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Specially translated for ONCE A WEEK *by*
MRS. ELLEN WAUGH

"Life is a comedy to those who think,
A tragedy to those who feel."
—HORACE WALPOLE

NEW YORK
PETER FENELON COLLIER
1893

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ONE OF US.

BOOK FIRST.

CARNIVAL.

CHAPTER I.

It was between 1860–70, and in Rome. Society had split up into the *monde noir* and the *monde blanc,* and had not yet assumed the slightest appearance of reuniting in a *monde gris.*

The Holy Father had intrenched himself in the Vatican, behind his prestige of martyrdom. The King had begun to hold his court at the Quirinal.

Among the most distinguished Austrian families wintering in Rome were the Otto Ilsenberghs. Count Otto Ilsenbergh, one of the chiefs of Austrian feudalism, was residing in Rome ostensibly for his health, but, in reality, to be at the fountain-head of the Vatican for the purpose of compiling a certain "History of Miracles," which has recently been published under a certain curious pseudonym. He had taken up his abode with the countess and a whole regiment of big and little auburn-haired

Ilsenberghs on the Corso in Palazzo—an immense historical mansion with cold stone staircases and spacious suites of apartments, seeming, by reason of their vastness, far more suited to gatherings of conspirators than to harmless routes and dances.

The countess received every evening, when nothing more amusing was on the tapis. She was by birth a Princess Anerstein, of the line of Anerstein-Zolling, whose women are noted for their white eyebrows and their rigid notions of morality.

The Ilsenbergh soirees were very popular; there was an atmosphere of ease about them. Smoking was allowed in the drawing-room—the countess herself smoked, sometimes even regalias.

It was the beginning of December. The heavy rain came dashing audibly against the windows. In a spacious apartment, far too large for comfort, the walls of which were decorated with frescoes, sat Count Ilsenbergh at a dainty davenport, evidently only intended for the fabrication of love letters, writing busily at an article for *Our Times*, a journal of strong feudal proclivities, patronized by the count and supported by the Austrian nobility, but read by no one, save by the Liberal press when on the hunt after reactionary extravagances.

Count Ilsenbergh was in low spirits. Austrian statecraft had just crowned its ever-brilliant achievements by proclaiming for the fourth time within the last three years a "New Era," and, throwing all established convictions to the

winds, had gathered together an ultra-Liberal Ministry, who not only made the largest of promises, but would inevitably swell the ranks of the Ring Strasse salons by the addition of some half-dozen new-made peers. Count Ilsenbergh prophesied the end of the world.

The countess, reclining in an easy-chair by the fireplace, a piece of marvelously exquisite Renaissance workmanship, was reading. The choicest editions of Mommsen and Ampère lay scattered about upon the tables, but the book in her hand was a well-worn novel from the circulating library.

A tall, fresh-colored, sandy-haired woman of somewhat large proportions and insignificant features, but with small, well-shaped hands and feet, Countess Ilsenbergh spoke French and German with a strong Viennese accent. Her style of dress was old-fashioned and her movements heavy; yet withal, to the initiated eye, she was unmistakably the lady and aristocrat. An imposing feature at all court festivities, she never stumbled over her train, and bore the weight of the family diamonds with high-born indifference. The portière was drawn back, and General von Klinger announced.

General von Klinger was an old Austrian cavalryman who, having had the good fortune to distinguish himself and his regiment at Sadowa, had, in disgust at the subsequent "national disgrace," sent in his resignation; and had since devoted himself and his title of general, conferred upon him on his resignation, to the study of painting.

As an army man he had been looked upon as an artistic genius, and was famed for the skill with which, with his gold pencil, he would sketch on the back of an old letter or visiting card a race-horse in full gallop, the jockey bending low, the rapidity with which these works of art were accomplished being one of their great sources of admiration. Since then he had "studied art" in Paris, had had his pictures refused three times by the Salon hanging committee, and had finally decided to take this expression of opinion as a special distinction, thus following the example of Rousseau, Delacroix and others, like sufferers with himself. As a genius *incompris* he had left Paris for Rome, where, in the Piazza Navona, he had installed himself as artist in a charming studio, thrown open daily from three to five o'clock, and a favorite resort of society in Rome.

People smiled at the old soldier's art, without finding him in any way an object of derision; he was universally respected as a man of honor and a gentleman.

Like many old bachelors whose celibacy has dated from an unhappy love affair, his cynical bitterness had a background of sentiment; in other words, he was a pessimistic idealist. A handsome, military-looking old man with stiff shirt collar and splendid eyes, wherein lurked a world of romance, he was a special favorite with all the great ladies in Rome.

"How nice of you to have looked in upon us, general," was the countess's greeting. "Hor-

rid weather, is it not? Come to the fire and try to get warm."

The count, looking up from his writing, said: "How d'ye do, general?" then bent again over his article, with an apologetic "Such an old friend as you will forgive my just finishing these few lines—three words and I have done. These are serious times; in which it behooves every man to stand firm to his colors," and this ardent defender of feudalism mournfully dipped his pen again in the ink.

The general begged him not to disturb himself on his account. The countess had just begun to speak about a musical soiree at which they had been the night before when her husband, dashing a line under his completed article, exclaimed triumphantly:

"There, that will give them something to solve!" and joined his wife and the general by the fire.

A carriage passing below drew up.

"That must be Truyn; he was to arrive last night," said the countess. And at that moment Count Truyn was announced.

Erich Truyn was at that time a handsome man of about thirty, with hair already turning gray, and cold, distant expression. He went by the name of Truyn *frappe* because he always gave the impression of having been frozen to a crystalline icicle. His frigid exterior obtained him the reputation of excessive haughtiness, which was a calumny. He had, in reality, the sweetest of dispositions, what was set down as haughtiness in him being merely the shyness

of an oversensitive nature, which, having once brought him into ridicule by its extreme idealism, now sought jealously to conceal itself from the scorn of the world by a cold exterior.

"Ah, Truyn, at last!" exclaimed the countess, with her gracious cordiality. "How are you?"

"Much as usual," was the reply.

"How is your wife?" asked Ilsenbergh.

"I do not know."

"Still at Nice?"

"I do not know." As he spoke his face assumed a more than ever cold and icy look.

"Are you making a long stay in Rome?" the countess now asked, anxious to turn the conversation to a less painful theme.

"As long as it agrees with my little comrade, and she can be happy here," replied Count Truyn. He always called his little twelve-year-old daughter and only child his comrade.

"You must bring Gabrielle very soon to see us," observed the countess. "Mimi and Lintschi are about her age."

"I hope to bring her the very next time I come, countess, but she is, unfortunately, so very shy that she does not get on with strangers; though she has struck up quite a warm friendship with the general, and for our cousin Sempaly."

"Nicki!" exclaimed the countess, amazed. "Has he the patience to amuse children?"

"He has quite a special talent that way. He was dining with us to-day."

"He is unaccountable," lamented the countess. "He hardly ever comes near us."

A light step was heard in the anteroom, and Count Sempaly was announced.

"*Inpus in fabula*," observed Ilsenbergh.

The new arrival, a young man about eight or nine-and-twenty, was of middle height, of slight but muscular build, unusually handsome, with dark, regular features, an insinuating smile, and a pair of speaking deep-blue eyes under long, dark lashes. With that insinuating smile of his, he would say the most audacious things, nor could any one determine whether the light in those blue eyes meant a flash of anger or a ray of sunshine.

With easy gallantry kissing the tips of the countess's fingers, he saluted the gentlemen with his wonted air of brusk cordiality, and subsided on to a tabouret by the side of the lady of the house.

"It is quite a treat to see you at last, Nicki," said the countess, with an air of affectionate reproach. "You never come near us; and one hardly ever meets you anywhere now. How is it that you shut yourself out of society in this manner?"

"Because he finds more congenial amusement elsewhere," tittered Ilsenbergh, half aloud.

A severe look from his wife here admonished the speaker to assume a more dignified demeanor.

"I find I cannot manage it," replied Sempaly, apologetically and with a half-smile. "I really have too much to do."

"Too much to do?" asked Truyn, with quiet irony. "What, in the political world? Anything new?"

"The latest thing out is a striking leading article in the *Temps*, upon the 'Ewer and Basin Question,'" replied Sempaly, with affected gravity.

"The Ewer and Basin Question?" they all repeated, in astonishment.

"Yes," continued Sempaly, sweetly; "the facts of the case are these: The young Duke of B——n, recently entering upon his year's military service in Paris, was most unpleasantly surprised to find that he was not only expected to keep in barracks with the other privates, but that he had to perform his daily ablutions at the pump. This so incensed his ducal mamma that she presented herself at the War Office to request that a separate washing apparatus be arranged for her son. After lengthened deliberation, the War Office has decided to reject her application, on the grounds that this separate toilet arrangement would militate against the undying principles of '89."

"Hardly possible!" commented Truyn. Ilsenbergh shrugged his shoulders, and the countess inquired, naively:

"What are the undying principles of '89?"

"Certain idealistic pacific conventions between the *canaille* and the aristocracy," said Sempaly, calmly. "Or, if you prefer it, a first surrender of prejudice to the claims of higher humanity," he added, humorously.

The countess remained as wise as she was

before. Sempaly, with a satirical smile, fanned himself with a Japanese hand screen and Ilsenbergh remarked :

"Aha ! you have turned Democrat, Sempaly !"

"From a bird's-eye point of view," observed Truyn, dryly. His cousin's Liberal proclivities inspired him with but little confidence.

"I am always a Democrat, after having read the 'Middle Ages,'" said Sempaly. The "Middle Ages" was the title he gave to his cousin's reactionary paper. "Moreover, jesting aside, I am a Liberal by conviction ; but, none the less, I cannot see the growing power of the Radicals without some apprehension. *Tiens !* I had forgotten to give you some news that will interest you, Fritzi ! The Reds are victorious throughout Paris and the King has been shot at in Madrid !"

"Horrible !" shuddered the countess. "We shall see another Commune !"

"Ninety-three," remarked Truyn, quietly.

"We positively need to draw a cordon round the Austrian monarchy to protect it from the encroachments of the plague of democracy," observed Sempaly, gravely. "Ilsenbergh, you had better bring forward a motion to that effect in the Lords'."

"Your bad jests are out of place," said the countess. "Things really are growing serious."

"Not with us, so far," said Truyn. "Our people are much too long-suffering."

"They are sound at heart," put in Ilsenbergh, pathetically.

"They have not much notion of freedom as yet," returned Sempaly, smiling, "and equality is akin to metaphysics with them—caviare to the multitude." To which responded Ilsenbergh: "Our Austrian people are good and loyally-minded. They know—"

"Oh," interrupted Sempaly, laughing; "to your good fortune, they know very little. If once the eyes of their understanding become opened, your lives will not be worth many days' purchase. If I had been apprentice to a bricklayer, I should have been a Social Democrat, too!"

At which brilliant climax Sempaly, crossing his arms, looked round defiantly at the company.

"A Social Democrat!" cried Ilsenbergh, aghast. "You! No, Nicki, that you never could have become. One thing alone would have preserved you from such an enormity—religion!"

"'Hm!" muttered Sempaly, meditatively; and Truyn observed, with a scornful curl of his lips:

"Perhaps, as a bricklayer's apprentice, Sempaly would not have been overburdened with religion. It might have seemed a little difficult to him to acknowledge as divine the Being who had dealt so hardly by him."

"Be quiet, Truyn," cried Sempaly, somewhat nervously. "You know I object to having matters of faith brought in question."

"Ah! true. You go about wearing Roman Catholic eyeblinkers, and are in holy fear about the articles of your faith. It would be deuced uncomfortable for you not to be able to flatter yourself that your easy-going, little life was to be prolonged indefinitely," said Truyn, without a trace of pleasantry and with a kind of weary irony.

It was well known that Sempaly held no religious opinions; but, like many other favored children of fortune, clung tenaciously to a belief in immortality. Thus he gladly hoodwinked himself, and for all the world would not have looked into any book of heterodox opinions, such as "David Strauss," for instance.

"The sword is hanging over our very heads," sighed the countess, still absorbed in her dark forebodings. "This new Ministry!" and she shook her head.

"Is not of much account, save to give occasion for a few prosy leading articles in the daily papers, and to frame a whole sheaf of laws of which the monarchy will take no notice," remarked Sempaly.

"The Austrian *canaille* is already sharpening its teeth," groaned the anxious lady.

"Bah! the Austrian *canaille* is sound enough at heart. It will only bite when you refuse to let it lick your hands," said her cousin, reassuringly.

"I should consider the one as unpleasant as the other," returned the countess, looking down affectionately at her delicate white hands.

"Tell me, Nicki," broke in the count, "has

not this new Ministry affected your prospects of advancement?"

Count Sempaly was a rising member of the Austrian political party in Rome.

"Yes, by jove! it has," returned Sempaly. "I was hoping to be sent to London as secretary to the legation there. Now, one of the secretaries here is chosen for the post and our friends the Democrats are sending us one of their proteges to take his place. I heard it today from my chief."

"Who is the new secretary?" asked the countess, anxiously. "If he is a protege of those people, he must be detestable."

"A man of the name of Sterzl; has good recommendations. Comes from Teheran, where he seems to have made his mark," said Sempaly.

"Sterzl!" exclaimed Ilsenbergh, ironically.

"Sterzl!" cried his wife, in dismay. "It is to be hoped that the man is not married—that would be the crowning blow!"

"Thereupon I can reassure you, countess," said the general, "Sterzl is not a married man."

"Is he—a friend of yours?" she asked, in some embarrassment.

"He is the son of one of my dearest chums," replied the general, "and if he only fulfill the promise of his youth, as fine a fellow in mind and heart as one could desire to meet; a man of character and ability."

"That is always a good point," lisped Ilsenbergh, condescendingly.

"Yes, I really believe it is," assented Sem-

paly, stroking his mustache. "Heaven knows we can do with a worker here."

"I had been promised the post for my nephew," murmured the countess, dejectedly. "How very annoying!"

"Very," returned Sempaly, satirically.

"That sort of unknown element is so confoundedly perplexing, isn't it? We so greatly prefer that it should be confined to 'one of us.'"

Here the tea equipage making its appearance upon a Japanese etagere, the low-born secretary was consigned to oblivion for the time being.

CHAPTER II.

Count Sempaly did not affect Democratic views merely to scandalize his cousin; he really believed himself to be a Liberal because he cut bad jokes at the Conservatives, and chose to stigmatize the peerage as a venerable institution about as up to date as the Pyramids, but considerably less lasting. Yet, despite his respect for the masses, in theory, and his would-be witty contempt for the reactionary party, Sempaly was at heart a far stronger adherent to the classes than was his mediævally-disposed cousin, Ilsenbergh. With all his feudal mysticism, Count Ilsenbergh's aristocratic prejudices were but those of birth—Sempaly's those of instinct. Ilsenbergh's notion of what was due to

his rank proceeded from pride of race and party feeling; with Sempaly it was a matter of nerves.

A few days after the above related discussion in Countess Ilsenbergh's drawing-room, Sempaly, happening to meet the general, informed him of the arrival of the new secretary, adding, with a laugh: "I don't think he will go down."

"Why?" asked the general.

"Because he talks execrable French, and knows nothing of old China," replied Sempaly, with great gravity. Then—"I introduced him to Countess Gaudry yesterday. He had hardly turned his back when she asked me—h'm! she is a glovemaker's daughter from Lille—'Is he a noble?' and, would you believe it, I could not tell her. When it comes to knowing which plebeian may have been created baron or what Jew turned Christian, I simply give it up!" Then, with a sly smile: "His name is Cecil Maria!—Cecil Maria Sterzl; a nice thing in names, is it not?"

Cecil Maria! The name was ridiculous, and suited him ill. His father had been an officer in the dragoons, who, retiring early in life from the army, had afterward devoted himself to his favorite pursuit of agriculture. His mother was a Fraulein von—— past her first youth at the time of her marriage, who, not content with having *her* coronet upon every article of her trousseau and emblazoned upon all her possessions, ever after must have a flag with the colors of *her* coat of arms flying from the small tower of the modest castle where she resided,

and receive from all her friends and acquaintances the title of "baroness," which, to tell the truth, she was in no wise entitled to assume.

When, in the first year of her marriage, a fine boy was born to her, the question of what name should be given him was naturally under eager discussion.

"Cecil Maria," whispered the mother.

"What nonsense! The boy shall be called Antony, after his grandfather!" exclaimed the sensible father.

Whereupon the mother burst into tears. What chance has a reasonable *paterfamilias* when the mother of his first born dissolves into tears?

The little fellow was accordingly christened Cecil.

When scarce forty years old his father, who had devoted himself to nursing his little girl through scarlet fever, caught the infection and died.

Cecil was then a handsome, sturdy little chap with a strong contempt for the French language, which his sister's governess was desirous of instilling into him, and a decided leaning toward the society of coachmen and village lads. The baroness's one sorrow was that he was lazy and would not take sufficient care of his hands. The guardianship of the children had been confided to General Sterzl, an elder brother of their late father. He interested himself for their welfare, looked after their property carefully and guided their education conscientiously. After a short acquaintance with

the gifted boy, allowed thus to run wild, and of the affected mother and intimidated tutor, he shrugged his shoulders at the "whole concern" and placed Cecil in the Theresianum, the school so highly prized by all Austrian military men—when they do not happen to have been educated there themselves.

During the first half-year Cecil was utterly miserable in his new surroundings; he, who hitherto in the course of his short life had been always accustomed to feel himself the first in every one's estimation, now found himself relegated to the background.

Though far above the average of his schoolfellows in natural ability, thanks to his neglected education, he was considerably behind them in his work. Moreover, besides one boy from the town of Graz, who was given to boast of a left-handed graft of nobility, he was the only one among them who had no handle to his name. His schoolfellows twitted him about his Moravian accent, his clumsiness, his name. We have all had to suffer like tortures at school. It was a long time before he got reconciled to the state of things, and never ceased during the first half besieging his mother and guardian with letters entreating release from his durance vile. But both mother and guardian remained deaf to his entreaties. The results, brought home by Cecil at the beginning of the midsummer holidays, were depressed spirits and well-cared-for nails.

He began the following half by administering a sound thrashing to the tedious boaster from

Graz, who had made himself obnoxious to the whole school by his vauntings of his illegitimate descent and other pretensions. This at once insured him popularity. He began to study diligently; his professors praised his assiduity, and his complaints ceased.

Had that subtle, poisonous vanity which pervades the Theresianum begun to work in his veins, too? Was he also beginning to find a charm in hearing mass read on Sundays and saints' days by a bishop—of being waited upon by orderlies in uniforms—of taking his dancing lessons from the court dancing master—of finding himself on familiar terms with the most distinguished scions of Austrian nobility? It were difficult to decide. Outwardly he took it all with the greatest indifference, and remained free from all appearance of affectation. His pride was too intense to allow of outward manifestations. Later he went into the Oriental Academy, passed the examinations with brilliant success, and, still under his uncle's auspices, entered upon a diplomatic career. He was sent first to an Asiatic capital, decimated by cholera and a prey to revolutionary outbreak. There he distinguished himself and received the order of the Iron Crown.

Society in Rome was quickly agreed on one point—the new secretary was not a man to be gauged by any light-minded sneer. There was nothing little or commonplace about him. In person, he was tall, broad-shouldered and erect, with a bearing which gave him the appearance of a military man in *mufti*, his brown hair

short cut, his features strongly defined. He was heavy in manner, but a thorough gentleman, simple and unexacting.

CHAPTER III.

THE opinion expressed by the embassador concerning the new secretary was very different from that of Sempaly.

"My best worker," said His Excellency. "A remarkable worker. Clear head—good ability—but might be more tractable—might be more tractable."

Nor was the good opinion so quickly gained by him confined to his chief; between himself and his younger colleagues there soon reigned the best of relations. He possessed one quality rarely found among men who take life so seriously—he never caviled at others. The embassy in Rome was thronged at that time with handsome young loungers, who, as Sempaly with ready wit expressed it, gave the Plazza di Venegia the appearance of a boarding-school for mustachioed young countesses. Sterzl looked upon their harmless frittering away of time with the greatest composure and indulgence. It was useless to expect any work from such idlers. As well endeavor to train butterflies to be ants! He was ever ready to make good their small omissions; to give them

every freedom to pursue their life of pleasure. He wanted to work—to be doing something—that was his way; they wanted to lounge and enjoy life—that was their way. Thus each got on excellently.

But though Sterzl at once fitted in so capitally with his colleagues, between himself and Roman society there was a certain coldness.

His predecessor had not made the remotest claim to any exceptional merit in his diplomatic services, but then he had waltzed well, and, moreover, had not scorned the accomplishment; therefore he had been a favorite with the ladies. They mourned his loss, and were eager to know how his successor would replace him. Sterzl was the last man to do this; he was utterly deficient in that light-hearted courtesy and amiable superficiality necessary to make a man popular in society. His heavy conscientiousness and pedantic exactitude rendered him altogether unsuited to the frivolous tone of small talk.

He usually moved silently observant through the throng. If he spoke at all, it was to say exactly what he thought; and he expected the same sincerity from every one else. He did not understand that the customary pretty speeches and evasions of society were, after all, but another lower form of love to one's neighbor; that the universal candor he exacted must result in universal war; that the limits between candor and impertinence, between hypocrisy and true courtesy are not yet clearly enough defined; that one could as well speak out the whole

truth in a lady's drawing-room as appear there in his shirt-sleeves; and that in the faulty condition of our souls it is fortunate for us that etiquette forbids us, whether corporeally or mentally, to appear before others unless fittingly clad. Good Heavens! what figure should we cut without that precaution! The world cannot exist without lying. A man accustomed to society exacts the lie from it as a right, a courtesy to which he has a claim. As soon as a man is not worth a lie he is played out, like the Countess Orsina, and can take his departure.

Sterzl was not a ladies' man; he had no chance with them. They nicknamed him *le paysan du Danube.* The men esteemed him; they regretted his exaggerated views, more particularly his excessive sensitiveness in matters of honor. Still, that is an error which men are never seriously down upon.

Sterzl was absolutely indifferent as to what people in general had to say about him. Ever ready to go through fire and water for a friend, he was so indifferent to mere acquaintances that he often forgot even to bow to them in the street when, pondering some great scheme, he would stride along his way. He was certainly intended to do some great work in life, perhaps even to attain to eminence; but—

CHAPTER IV.

THE Princess Vulpini, in no wise proof against the latest fashionable disorder, *morbus Schliemaniensis*, had just made a most wonderful find at a rococo dealer's in the Via d'Araccoli. She had bought of him two rare escutcheons, alleged to be from designs of Benvenuto Cellini, and a piece of tapestry stated to be from a design of Raphael, and had now invited a few intimate friends—Truyn, Sempaly, General von Klinger and one of the Austrian attaches, Count Siegburg—to pronounce upon the genuine nature of her find.

The princess, a younger sister of Count Truyn's, had met Prince Vulpini at Vichi, whither she had accompanied her invalid father. Their marriage quickly followed, and she had now lived some ten or twelve years in Rome, which she greatly liked, although never ceasing to deplore certain discomforts nor to laud her native Vienna, always making a point of having everything sent her from "home"—being firmly convinced that there was absolutely nothing obtainable in Rome save photographs, antiquities and wax matches.

Dinner was over. The conversation, which had been of a very animated nature, had consisted of one long tirade against the new Italian Government. Arrived at the stage of coffee and cigarettes, the guests were devoting them-

selves to examination of the antiquities spread out for their critical judgment upon the carpet. Now and again one or other of the men, gravely going down on hands and knees, better to see the arrazzo and the bronzes, would, with utmost conscientiousness, deliver an opinion.

The only convert to their genuine nature was the Countess Marie Schalingen, a canoness newly arrived in Rome and staying with the princess. Every one else was skeptical. The most decided was Count Siegburg, who, although, or, perhaps, because, he knew least about such things, threw in an occasional "imitation" "made up" with telling effect.

Wieprecht Siegburg, or Wips, as he was commonly called, was a great favorite in Austrian circles. I doubt whether he could have invented gunpowder, discovered America or have decided the movement of the earth; but all the same, for purposes of daily intercourse he was, perhaps, a more agreeable associate than Berthold Schwarz or Columbus or Galileo would have been. He was attached to the embassy, not as a career, but just simply to remove him from Vienna, where he had managed to get over head and ears in debt. After much anxious deliberation his widowed mother had hit upon this excellent method of checking her beloved son in his spendthrift course.

"You make me quite nervous, Count Siegburg," cried the princess, at length. "Besides, you have not the slightest pretension to any knowledge of antiquities."

"I believe you are right, princess," he an-

swered, calmly. "Anyway, I have lately had occasion to suffer rather considerably for too great faith in my own critical judgment. Till then I flattered myself that the genuineness of an antique was to be estimated by the depth of its dust and cobwebs; but since I have got to know that even that venerable covering can be produced by the artifice of the dealer, I must confess to having lost my one sheet anchor."

Here they all laughed. Not that the sally was especially witty, but because it was the custom to laugh at Siegburg's jokes.

They were in the smoking-room—a retreat comfortably and artistically arranged with its carved oak and Oriental hangings, and admirably adapted to promote the feeling of "among ourselves," that admixture of well-bred courtesy and cordial familiarity so dear to the initiated. They did not enter very profoundly upon learned subjects, they rather touched the surface of things; sometimes made poor jests; told anecdotes after the manner of St. Simon, though without giving offense to any one, because they abstained from carrying out things to the bitter end, and did not subject them to chemical analysis. In a word, they were superficial; and to be so sometimes is a commendable virtue.

"This is delightful—so thoroughly Austrian to-night," exclaimed the princess, "but I fear our comfort is not of long duration. I have a presentiment. Do you know that we have Mesdames de Gaudry and Ferguson dining in the neighborhood?"

As she spoke Prince Norina was announced.

"'Coming events cast their shadows before,'" quoted Sempaly, half aloud.

It was well known in Roman circles that the appearance of Prince Norina was quickly followed by that of the Countess de Gaudry. The prince was a tall, fair young man, of fashion-plate style of beauty, and for some five years past the devoted slave of the above-named lady.

Having greeted the princess, he shook hands with the gentlemen and entered at once into an animated conversation with the master of the house upon the latest blunders of the King's Government.

Vulpini was the blackest of the black, a stanch adherent of the Pope, more on political than religious grounds—principally because as a Roman noble, fanatically exclusive, he admitted no community of interest with Italians proper, and looked upon a united Italy as a delusive impossibility. Prince Norina, guiltless of any political convictions, and a member both of the Caccia and Scachi Clubs, acquiesced in all his host's representations without giving ear to any.

Shortly after Norina's entrance a move was made to the drawing-room, a spacious apartment furnished somewhat promiscuously with a combination of Louis XIV. and Empire styles, and which stood between the official reception-room, where the princess received publicly, and the boudoir, sacred to her intimate friends.

The cheerfulness before prevailing had perceptibly chilled down and had reached the stage when people turn to photographs as a resource, when Mesdames de Gaudry and Ferguson were announced and rustled in. The lady who had the distinction of wielding the scepter over Prince Norina was a pale brunette, rather interesting-looking than pretty, with short features and weird, searching eyes, loud and assuming in manner to impertinence, which she considered as *grand genre*. Society had, probably for its own convenience, chosen to look upon her intimacy with the prince as merely good-fellowship, and the countess one of those women who like the excitement of walking on the very verge of a precipice. Mrs. Ferguson, daughter of a hotel keeper in San Francisco and wife of an invisible Crœsus, in contrast to Mme. de Gaudry was very fair, with large, blue eyes. She had a row of sharp little teeth, and was of slight build and flat-chested. She painted, dyed her hair, dressed in *outre* manner, spoke English with a Yankee drawl and French with a shocking accent, sang startling couplets *a la* Judic, and owed her introduction to society to a certain Marchese B., whose acquaintance she had made at Nice. Her friendship with Mme. de Gaudry had resulted from their having shared a joint landau together, would probably culminate in a joint opera-box and go to pieces over a joint admirer.

They had two men in attendance, the Count de Gaudry, who looked like a barber's block and was generally suspected of carrying on an old

curiosity shop under another name, and M. Dieudonne Crespigny de Bellancourt, a broad-shouldered French diplomatist, son of a butcher and brother-in-law to a duke. The conversation turned upon the domestic troubles of the Z—s, the Roman climate and the latest excavations. Mesdames de Gaudry and Ferguson lent themselves at first to the well-bred tedium of general conversation, the while gradually contriving to attract to themselves as much individual attention from the men as was possible under the circumstances.

Shortly after eleven came Countess Ilsenbergh from a state dinner party, looking very bored. "It is positively too absurd how one meets all the world here in Rome," she exclaimed, after answering various questions as to the function at which she had assisted. "Can you guess whom I came across to-day, Marie? That Lenz girl from Vienna—now she is either a Duchess or Countess Montidor—I once had to do with her years ago about some Charity Bazaar. Up she comes to me like any old friend and gushes about 'we Austrians' and 'our dear Vienna!' Did you ever hear anything so amusing?"

"Humph! Poor Fritzi! you are to be pitied," said Sempaly with a malicious smile. "Never mind, there is a real treat in store for you. Sterzl's mother and sister will be here in a day or two."

"Indeed? Humph! That is unpleasant news."

"Why?" inquired Mme. de Gaudry, mixing

eagerly in their talk. "Are they in any way doubtful?"

"By no means," said Countess Ilsenbergh, interrupting her hastily. "I believe them to be most worthy people, but—all the same, it is trying to the last degree to be constantly meeting people here in society whom one could not know in Vienna. You must give him a hint, Nicki. You must tell him—tell him—"

"All right, Fritzi," returned Sempaly, laughing, "I will tell him—my dear fellow, keep your women folk to yourself, it would be so deuced disagreeable to my cousin Ilsenbergh to meet them anywhere." With a shrug of her shoulders Countess Ilsenbergh, turning away from her humorous cousin, began somewhat nervously fanning herself with her tortoise-shell fan, as she asked:

"Shall you receive these people, Marie?"

"Whom do I not receive?" returned the princess, meaningly and half aloud.

"I cannot—decidedly not," continued Countess Ilsenbergh, growing more and more annoyed, "sorry as I shall be to hurt Sterzl's feelings. He will only have himself to blame for obliging me to take such a step."

"Act as you think best," answered the princess; "but, as you know, I have great sympathy with Sterzl—he may reckon on a stanch friend in me."

"The *paysan du Danube*," giggled De Gaudry, to whom the conversation of the two Austrian ladies was rather enigmatical.

"Herr Sterzl is a gentleman," remarked

Countess Ilsenbergh, icily. A Gaudry should not be suffered to make merry over a countryman of hers, though not of noble birth.

"The *paysan du Danube* is a particular friend of mine," said Princess Vulpini, with decision, and with the childlike warmth so characteristic of her. "I am very fond of him; he is quite 'one of us.'"

"Higher praise could not be awarded on this earth," observed Truyn, with good-natured irony.

"When baby fell and broke his arm here the other day it was he who picked him up, and you should have seen how tenderly he handled my little darling," continued the princess.

"An admirable proof of the eligibility of the ladies of his family," said Sempaly, laughing.

"Excuse the question," broke in Countess Gaudry; "it is merely to understand the situation—the Sterzls are not in Austrian society?"

"Our home etiquette could hardly serve as a precedent for foreign society," said Truyn, with some asperity; he could not endure Countess Gaudry. "In Austria no one is received who is not one of us by birth."

"Yes," filled in Sempaly, humorously, "Austrian society is as exclusive as the stem of Israel—it scorns to make proselytes."

And the glove manufacturer's daughter, who evidently had not understood Count Truyn's remark, or who thought it better to appear not to have done so, said, with much assurance:

"It is very useful to know these things."

Siegburg, sitting behind her, winked at Sem-

paly with a comical grimace. Princess Vulpini looked almost angry.

"I declare, I will not leave Sterzl in the lurch," she cried, "and, if his sister be all that he describes her to be, I—"

"Has he already given you a description of his sister?" asked Sempaly.

"Oh, yes, indeed," replied the princess, smiling kindly. "Have you not had one, Nicki?"

"Heaven forbid! He never speaks to me of his household deities! I am not worthy to be taken into his confidence. He merely deigned to inform me that they were coming, smiling curiously the while! Humph! He seems to think the young lady perfection—means her to make a brilliant match, I suppose. I should be confoundedly surprised if that was not his motive in bringing her here. Norina, you'd better beware!"

"Mlle. Sterzl would surely not aspire to a princely coronet," said Countess de Gaudry, protecting her property with some asperity.

"Sterzl will accept nothing less for his sister," asserted Sempaly.

"Do not talk such folly, Sempaly," said Truyn, endeavoring to check his cousin's wild spirits.

The latter had thrown himself upon a settee and, bending over the cover of a letter, was making a hurried sketch. Presently he handed it to the Countess Ilsenbergh.

Mme. de Gaudry, looking over her shoulder, exclaimed:

"Capital—capital!"

Sterzl, as auctioneer, was standing, the hammer in one hand, in the other a fashionably dressed doll; round him were grouped all the coroneted heads of Rome. In one corner of the paper were the words: "Fraulein Sterzl for the first—second—third time of asking!"

The sketch passed from hand to hand. It was a speaking likeness of Sterzl. Soon after, Countess Ilsenbergh left, and as the entertainment began to flag, the two lady friends took their departure soon after midnight, and those gentlemen who had been only attracted by their presence quickly followed suit.

"Fritzi positively suffers from an *idee fixe*," began the princess, with a shrug of the shoulders, as soon as all indiscreet strangers had withdrawn. "Now she would have me apply hard and fast rules to this poor girl! What harm can the child do me?"

"Can't conceive," replied Siegburg, lazily, "and d'ye know, by jove! if the girl's pretty and has money, I've a great mind to marry her myself, *cela regularisera la position!*"

There was nothing Siegburg liked so much as to talk of the money his future wife was to bring him. He was as fond of boasting of a selfishness he really did not possess as many a rich man of poverty.

"Besides, it was a shocking want of tact on Fritzi's part to bring up this stupid question of receiving, or not receiving, before those two caddish persons," continued the princess; she liked to make use occasionally of strong expressions, which from her lips, far from being repellant,

rather acquired a charm of their own. "The idea of my suddenly doing the exclusive!"

"Did you notice how our countess par excellence prepared to follow in Fritzi's footsteps?" asked Siegburg.

Meanwhile, Count Truyn, with the good-natured assistance of the master of the house, had been searching in some haste upon the mantelpiece and neighboring etageres.

"What are you looking for, Erich?" asked the princess.

"That sketch of Sempaly's. I do not care to have it lying about. No offense, Nicki; the caricature was excellent; I should have thought nothing of it had we been among ourselves; but I do not think you should have shown it about to strangers. You are such a careless fellow, you never think of consequences."

"What the devil have I done now?" demanded Sempaly, in some irritation. "Merely placarded a young lady as a marriage-hunting adventuress! Bah! The idea of any one taking every piece of fun seriously!" exclaimed Sempaly.

They searched everywhere for the slip of paper. It was nowhere to be found.

"I am convinced that that Piazzarola carried it off!" cried the princess in great annoyance. By the "Piazzarola" was naturally meant the amiable Countess de Gaudry.

CHAPTER V.

YES, the Princess Vulpini had a strong liking for Sterzl, a liking reciprocated by him with almost enthusiastic reverence. Despite his seemingly rough and prosaic exterior, he had within him a vein of chivalrous poetry and the highest admiration for true, pure womanhood. He could not bring himself to offer a woman that impertinent, well-nigh *risque*, flattery so welcome to many a one, and he did not know the language of fashionable adulation. Therefore, his bearing to those he called "true" women had something in it distinctly chivalrous and deferential; his whole manner so full of a kindly, Old-World courtesy that he at once won their hearts. He treated them part as children to be guarded; part as sacred relics to be worshiped.

Princess Vulpini quickly got to take a decided pleasure in his society. She would confide to him her little annoyances about this or that disagreeable aspect of Roman life, and rely upon him for all kinds of things, being, in common with all women of her amiable temperament, very helpless and thoroughly impractical.

CHAPTER VI.

As in Vienna society there had been few girls more charming than was the Countess Marie Truyn, so in Rome there was no sweeter woman than the Principessa Vulpini. When she was seen of an afternoon driving along the Corso to the Villa Borghese in her springed landau, always accompanied by some four or five lovely children, looking as if they had been stolen out of one of Kate Greenaway's picture-books, fashionable women who, instead of their children, preferred the companionship of some exquisitely got-up lady friend, would exclaim: "Here comes the hen!"

The men, on the contrary, would take off their hats with more than usual *empressement*, to which she would reply with so gracious and sweet a smile that it was like a ray of sunshine to the heart. She had never been regularly beautiful, and had early lost the freshness of youth, as well as the slender grace of her figure; yet there was still an indescribable charm in her appearance. The most lovely ornament of her youth, her superb chestnut hair, she still retained, wearing it, as she had done when a sixteen-year-old young countess, simply brushed back from her face and arranged in a wealth of thick plaits at the back of her perfectly formed head.

Her face, with its kindly eyes, delicate *re-*

trousee nose, tender mouth, ever ready to break into smiles, had still, despite its somewhat worn complexion, an almost childlike sweetness. Her movements were simple and graceful. Her whole appearance was fraught with the magic of exquisite distinction and noble womanliness.

Her style of dress was behind the fashion. Modern "chic" was not to her taste. She read much and seriously, principally books upon natural history. Yet she had not lost the naive faith of her early childhood, and this primitive Catholicism fitted in admirably with the simple earnestness of her nature. Sempaly, who was really fond of her, always characterized her enthusiastic piety as a lovely feature of her character. He declared that every really sympathetic woman must of necessity be religious; a man might allow himself to play the free-thinker, but a woman without religion would be as repulsive as a woman with a hump-back.

This remark, made one day by Sempaly in the presence of Sterzl, annoyed the latter, although possessed of even less actual religion than was Sempaly. He considerd it frivolous.

"The women whom a man holds as sacred he does not usually make subject of jest," he said, with that rigid pedantry of his which always excited Sempaly to a spirit of contradiction. In this case he deigned no further reply than by dropping the corners of his mouth and a careless shrug of the shoulders.

CHAPTER VII.

A FEW days after Count Sempaly had given such a brilliant example of his artistic proclivities General von Klinger, reclining upon a divan covered with costly Persian rugs, was engaged in teaching his parrot to sing the Austrian hymn, having nothing better to do to while away the time; a loyal occupation, but one against which the subject of his labors, clinging to the roof of his cage loudly flapping his wings, energetically protested.

It was a superb studio, that of the general's, the domed ceiling painted in fresco, with carved rococo cornices, and hangings of costly stuffs, tapestries and Oriental embroideries on the walls. So vast were its proportions, that people standing about in it looked like pigmies and the artist's paintings like a series of illustrations for books.

The sirocco was blowing without—the air was oppressive—the sky gray—and the general in low spirits. It had been a lost day with him as far as painting was concerned, and although the clock had struck a quarter to five, he had had no callers. Other days at this hour the studio was thronged, unpleasantly so. The general often complained—of course privately—over the interruption to work, exulting in it the while. Solitude made him melancholy. He began despondently to think how difficult it

was to get on in an artist's profession. His coloring was excellent, that all his brother artists assured him; but his technique left much to be desired, that he himself confessed. His specialties were: a harmonious tone of gray, and horses.

All his pictures—save one which the Emperor, rather from consideration for his past military services than for his present artistic powers, had bought at a high price—all his pictures came back to him from the exhibitions unsold. Artists, smoking his cigars, explained it by telling him that he was too independent in his artistic aspirations, too high-minded to make concessions to the masses, and would therefore never succeed with the general public. Just as he was in the act of carefully and deliberately whistling the hymn to the unruly parrot for the sixteenth time, he was interrupted by a knock at his door. He went to open it, and found Sempaly, who had come to tell him that he had just unearthed a treasure in the shape of a musty but exquisite piece of wall tapestry in a convent, which he had bought for a ridiculously low sum. He had actually bought it for the general, knowing how greatly he had been longing for such a find. "But if you don't like it," he concluded, "I will keep it myself."

No one could do another a service more modestly; no one offer thanks for a service rendered more gracefully than he. He had cultivated both to an art.

The business concluded, Sempaly began

feelingly to lament his ill-fortune at having to dine that evening at the English embassy, and go on to a dance at the French one, proceeding to rave to his old friend about the ideal life he would like to lead—a life in which routs, balls and dinner parties would be unknown. After which he began to look about among the studies—always kept by the general turned with their faces to the wall; commenting alternately with a "charming" or "superb" out of his easy good-nature, and because he always felt the wish to say something pleasant to people.

"Why don't you finish that one?" he said at last, of an unfinished sketch of two Bashi-bazouks.

"It would make it more salable," answered the general, somewhat testily, to whom the "finishing" offered certain insuperable difficulties, "but, you know, I make no concessions to the masses; I paint according to my own convictions, not with a view of pandering to the taste of the public."

Sempaly merely gave a smile at this artistic creed, as indeed it deserved.

"As the sale of your pictures is only a matter of caprice with you, general," said he, courteously, "I should advise you to renounce it altogether, and to present the entire collection of your pictures to the state—that we, in Vienna, may have our Wiery Museum, too."

But on the general assuring him, on the contrary, that he was thoroughly in earnest about selling his pictures, Sempaly, with a merry

twinkle, began thoughtfully: "Once there was a shoemaker, a genius, but he would only work according to his ideas of the beautiful and artistic convictions, and not according to the requirements of the public. Thus he would only make pure Grecian sandals, no such commonplace things as boots and shoes. That man died a bankrupt, but with the pleasing consciousness that he had made no concessions to the public!"

The general was about to make an angry retort to this malicious parable, when once more the loud knocking, considered to be etiquette at the doors of artists' studios, was audible. It is evidently supposed that it requires a certain amount of insistence to rouse an artist from his dreams.

The general went to open to the newcomer. The studio was separated from the hall by a small ante-chamber. Into this glided a tall, slender, exquisitely lovely sprite in a dark-hued dress and sealskin jacket.

"What, you, Zinka! What a surprise!" exclaimed the old general, in great delight. "How long have you been in Rome, dear child?"

"Since this morning," returned a merry voice.

"Did no one come with you?" asked the general, in surprise, as Zinka, shutting the door he had left open, hurried forward into the studio.

"No; no one," she answered, composedly. "I left my maid at home. She and mamma are both fast asleep, recruiting from the

fatigues of the journey. I ordered the carriage and came to see you all by myself; was it not very good of me? Why such an odd expression? and why have I had no kiss, uncle?"

Determined and defiant, with head thrown back and both hands in her little muff, the girl now stood before him, gazing with astonished expression at him from a pair of very large gray eyes.

"My dear Zinka," began the general, who, like all right-minded old gentlemen with a romantic past, was particular to a degree about the strict decorum of all the women folk in any way belonging to him, "I am immensely delighted at this visit from you; but, dear child, in a perfectly strange city where no one knows you, and in a house perfectly strange to you where—"

"Ah! now I see," broke in the girl. "It is not the proper thing to do! I shall live to be a hundred before I get to know what is the proper thing! Extraordinary! My dear old uncle used always to say it was all nonsense to trouble one's self about such things, for to a well-bred person everything was allowed, and from people of no breeding one expected nothing. But evidently he knew nothing at all about it!" and, turning vehemently on her heel, she made toward the door.

"But, my dear Zinka!" cried the general, holding her back, "tell me at least where you are staying, before you whirl off like a little fury. Do not be so unreasonable."

"I am perfectly reasonable," she replied.

She was embarrassed and exceedingly irate; her cheeks had an angry flush, tears glistened in her eyes.

"I should never, of myself, have dreamed that it would have been considered improper to pay a visit to an elderly gentleman"—with malicious emphasis on the qualifying adjective—"in his studio. But who can fathom the limits of man's vanity? However, I am perfectly reasonable and acknowledge my mistake. Like an idiot I had been rejoicing all day long at the thought of surprising you in your 'at home' hour; meant to have asked you to come round and dine with us at the Hotel de l'Europe, and first to drive with me to the Pincio to watch the sunset—and these are my thanks! Oh, no, pray do not seize your hat, *peine perdue,* I shall not be taking you with me now. Adieu!"

And she hastened away with head erect and without deigning to cast another glance at the general, who, however, dutifully attended her to her carriage. The poor old general came back thoroughly crestfallen.

A merry voice accosted him with: "Fallen into utter disgrace, general?"

It was Sempaly, totally forgotten by the owner of the studio, and who had been witness of the whole scene from a shady corner.

"So it seems," returned the latter, shortly, busying himself with a palette.

"I say, who on earth is this haughty little princess?"

"She? Zinka Sterzl, my godchild."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE *coup de foudre* has gone out of fashion, no one believes in it any more. Nevertheless, Sempaly himself never attempted to dispute the fact that he fell over head and ears in love with Zinka at first sight.

And when the general, some few days after Zinka had burst into the studio in the above-named abrupt fashion, having accepted an invitation to dine with the "Baroness" Sterzl at the Hotel de l'Europe, entered the said lady's drawing-room, the first person his eyes fell upon, standing by Zinka and deeply engaged in looking over a pile of photographs with her, was Count Sempaly.

The general and he were the only guests. Yet, or rather on that account, the conversation at dinner took as lively and animated a tone as was possible at any table presided over by so artificial an automaton as the "Baroness" Sterzl, who, poor woman, was the very essence of vanity and absurdity, and of distorted and narrow opinions. One of her crazes was, Heaven knows why or wherefore, that the general had been the victim of unrequited love for her; and she always assumed a manner of irritating tenderness toward him. Moreover, since he had last met her, she, or rather her children, had by the advantageous sale of some landed property become rich, which caused her

to adopt ever-increasing graces of manner, making intercourse with her, if possible, still more delightful. She complained of everything under the sun, in a would-be aristocratic, querulously nasal voice—the numerous discomforts of the sleeping-cars; the miserable manner in which the railway carriages were upholstered; of Roman dirt, Roman broughams and Roman hotels; dragged the names of all the aristocratic acquaintances she had made in Meran, Nice and Biarritz into her conversation; and asked, the next day being a saint's day, to what church "one" could go.

To which the choleric old general made angry reply: "God is everywhere." While Sempaly with courteous gravity said: "Cardinal X—— is to read mass at St. Peter's to-morrow; and the music there is very fine. I should recommend you to go to St. Peter's."

"Really? Can one really go to St. Peter's on a festival?" she returned. "The company is usually so mixed in such large churches."

The old general, ashamed of these absurdities before the children condemned to belong to her, endeavored to turn the conversation by asking Zinka slyly if she had yet forgiven him.

"As if I had had time to think any more of your straitlaced notions," returned Zinka, slightly coloring. It was evidently unpleasant to her to be reminded of her little escapade. "I have far too much else on my mind."

"What is that, pet?" asked her brother, sympathetically, who always took everything *au grand serieux*.

"I have lost something," she said, with affected melancholy, beneath which it was plain to see that she was jesting.

"What, not a four-leaved shamrock, or some prized trinket?" questioned the general.

"Oh, no, something far more important."

"Your porte-monnaie?" exclaimed the baroness in a vexed tone.

Here Zinka broke into a merry peal of laughter.

"Oh, no, mamma, something infinitely grander. Can no one guess? Rome!" Whereupon Sterzl, who never could follow his lovely sister's quaint fancies, exclaimed:

"That's beyond me."

And Sempaly, sympathizing, said:

"I see, fraulein, the cruel disillusion has come to you, too."

And Zinka, continuing to talk as one accustomed to be appreciated, said:

"Ever since I can remember I have dreamed of Rome, and longed to see it. *My* Rome was ever to me as the very outskirts of heaven—and this Rome is like an outskirt of Paris. *My* Rome was so beautiful, and this Rome is so ugly."

"No treason, Zinka!" exclaimed the general, who worshiped the traditional Rome with all the romance of his nature.

"I suppose, then, Rome is really not beautiful as a city," said Sterzl, soberly. "It is only interesting when regarded as an art map with life-sized, natural illustrations. Besides, you do not know it yet. So far you have only seen—"

"Houses, do you mean?" asked Zinka, lowering her eyes in seeming humility.

"It is quite too dreadful," broke in the baroness, piteously. "For five whole days have we been looking about without finding anything suitable. Every house we have seen has some disadvantage; either the stairs are too dark, or the entrance bad, or the drawing-rooms not *en suite*, or the servants' offices—"

"Yes, yes, my poor little Zinka," interrupted the general, hastily, "if you have as yet seen nothing of Rome but the furnished houses on the Corso you may well—"

"Oh! but I have seen something else," cried Zinka, merrily. "I have made thorough acquaintance with Rome."

"In your dreams?"

"No, yesterday, while mamma had *migraine*."

"Ah! that dreadful *migraine*," sighed the baroness, having recourse to her scent-bottle. "I am a perfect martyr to it."

To suffer from *migraine* and be a strict Catholic was, in the baroness's estimation, *bon genre*.

Sempaly, after looking at his hostess with politely sympathetic expression, turned to Zinka with a question.

"Yes, I assure you, I know every corner of Rome," she answered. "Ask the driver of cab No. 1203; he will tell you all about it. I hired him yesterday for three hours, and I do not know where we did not go. You see a whole week in Rome and only to have seen furnished apartments was a little too exasperating. So, making the best of my opportunity while

mamma was lying down to get rid of her headache, I slipped out—now, no more reproving looks, uncle. I had my maid with me, only meaning to go on foot, armed with Baedeker, and have a look about. Of course we lost our way, that is in the nature of things; and while we were standing perplexed, each holding on to a corner of our open Baedeker, a cab-driver drove up insinuatingly to the curbstone.

"We jumped in; he asked where we wanted to go. As I had no answer ready, he said—with, oh! such a considerate, protecting air: 'The signora wants to see Roma. All right! I will show the signora Roma,' and away he drove us, making endless little circles through the whole city. I was quite giddy with our waltz through the sights of Rome. He pointed out a whole forest of broken columns upon which were carved fragments of old Roman gods and goddesses, and remains of old temples all carefully carted off there like a 'variety of Christmas presents for art collectors.' 'Il Campo Vaccino,' he called it. I believe it was the Forum. Then he showed me the palace of Beatrice Cenci, the Jews' quarter, the Marcellus Theater, the Temple of Vesta; and every time he told me the name of any of these antiquities he would say: 'Am I not an honest cabman? Many another would only drive you from one to the other, and what would you see —nothing!—a heap of stones! I tell the signora this is the Coliseum, this is the Portico of Octavia, and the stones at once have a meaning.' Then, as he put me down at the hotel,

he gravely said: 'So. Now the signora knows Roma.'"

It was during dessert. The baroness looked greatly annoyed.

"I must beg you," she said, rising, "in future, first, not to enter into conversation with cab-drivers, and secondly, when you do drive out, not to take a *botta*" (the Roman one-horse carriage on hire); "it is not correct. You never have the slightest tact."

Zinka, as sensitive as she was spoiled, changed color.

"Oh, let her alone, mother; why should she not air her Italian and drive in a *botta* if she likes?" said Sterzl, who was sparring with his mother from morning to night.

While this was going on Sempaly took opportunity to say, in a low voice, to Zinka:

"I certainly cannot promise to be as entertaining as your cabman; but, if you will allow me, I should be delighted to help you to recover your lost Rome."

"Do you know your way about?" asked Zinka, with naive discourtesy.

"I am the *laquais de place* of the embassy," he replied, laughing. "My one occupation is to conduct distinguished Austrians round the curiosities of Rome."

The evening passed merrily. The baroness uttered a few more silly sayings, to which Sempaly gave ear with courteous gravity. Indeed, he was a model of good behavior. The baroness was quite dazzled by his "modesty"; not so

Sterzl. He knew that it was but put on; a masterpiece of aristocratic *savoir faire*. But the coming of his beloved sister had put him in wonderfully good spirits. True, he uttered one or two of his cutting aphorisms against the clerical party, and found fault with society in Rome; but sure as he began Zinka would break in with some charming piece of nonsense, and in her merry chatter he forgot all else.

At length he asked her to sing one of her Moravian *Volks lieder;* and setting herself at the hotel piano, she began. Her sweet, rather veiled voice had something mystical and poetical in it; her manner of singing, all the pathetic dreaminess of the Sclavonic race.

Sterzl, who yawned over an opera, listened to her voice, his head resting on his hand in a kind of ecstasy. Even in Sempaly, who, despite his Hungarian name, was of Moravian extraction, Zinka's simple melodies awakened echoes of a pure, fresh boyhood lost in the whirl of the world's pleasures. As she left off, he thanked her simply and earnestly.

Zinka's temperament was like an April day. After having brought tears into her own eyes, and those of her listeners, with the pathos of her songs, she must needs break daringly into one of Secocq's couplets which she had heard sung by Judic at Nice.

The meaning of the words she was rattling off with such satisfaction to herself was, as every sensible person could see, Chaldaic to her; but the baroness was beside herself with indignation. "Zinka!" she cried, affectedly;

"child, what can these gentlemen be thinking of you?"

"Pray, do not disturb yourself on that account," said the general.

Zinka was trembling; her pale, delicate face quivered with excitement. Here Sterzl stepped in to her assistance.

"It often needs but good-will to understand my sister," he said, turning to Sempaly. Then laying his great, strong hand tenderly on Zinka's fair head—"Think no more of it, Butterfly. But, for a young woman of your age, you are rather a goose!"

A little later, as Sempaly was leaving the Hotel de l'Europe with the general, his first words were:

"Can you explain how it happens that, with that fool of a mother, the daughter can have remained so angelically pure—so—Botticelli-like?"

CHAPTER IX.

SOME terrible disaster had occurred about this time to a Bohemian or Polish mine, by which more than five hundred families had been reduced to starvation.

Naturally the great world took advantage of the catastrophe to inaugurate a round of charity balls, fancy fairs and other benevolent means of extracting money from the pockets of the

rich, while at the same time drawing universal attention to itself by its philanthropic efforts.

After much weighty deliberation the Countess Ilsenbergh had arrived at the conclusion that, in consequence of both embassies being in deep mourning, it devolved upon her to initiate the necessary festivities.

The apartments of the Palazzo ——— were as if made for a great fete. After long deliberation it was decided that the philanthropic entertainment should assume a dramatic character. There was to be an operetta, a proverb of Musset and some *tableaux vivants*, to be followed by a collection.

Countess Gaudry developed the most astonishing powers of organization throughout. She was on the best of terms with the Villa Medici—the French Academy in Rome—and took the entire management of the scenery, the artistic *ensemble* of the costumes and, in fact, was the general referee. Up to a certain point all went to perfection. The operetta—of course *œuvre inedite*, and indeed the work of a Russian genius very proud of the fact that he could not read a note of music—was soon arranged for. There were only three characters in it, and it afforded opportunity for a choice rococo masquerade and, moreover, the insertion of some *piquante* Paris couplets.

Mrs. Ferguson, never averse to powder her hair, enamel her face and apply the necessary patches to enhanse her complexion, was to sing the soprano part ; Crespigny undertook the part of the husband or guardian, in smoking-

cap and beflowered dressing-gown ; and a young artist from Villa Medici, a M. Barillat, ever ready to sketch, or to wear the dress of a man about town, was to take the part of the lover.

Nor had there been any difficulty to find characters for the Musset proverb. But when it came to the tableaux, there was a great hitch. At first the ladies had taken up the idea enthusiastically, all eager to display their charms under the becoming auspices of tableau effects. The numbers of the fair aspirants were the first difficulty with which the committee, presided over by Countess Ilsenbergh, had to grapple. Then ensued a series of frictions and dissensions. The ladies were not satisfied with the subjects chosen ; declared the costumes selected for them to be unbecoming, the characters allotted to them unsuitable ; every one chosen to fill a secondary character took it as a deadly insult ; an acknowledged beauty priding herself on her left profile would not for the world exhibit her right profile to the critical remarks of the audience, etc., etc.

And then—grievous perplexity !—nearly every one of the available men of the countess's set evinced the most unconquerable aversion toward making themselves ridiculous in fancy dress, and turned an absolutely deaf ear to all the flattering invitations of the Ladies' Committee.

Sempaly, who had been chosen to personify a Roman emperor, refused to listen to the proposal that he should appear in a rose-colored toga, and suffer himself to be crowned with a

Bacchante wreath; and Count Truyn had shrugged his shoulders at the suggestion that he should wear a flowing wig.

Siegburg—always known as "little" Siegburg, though he was six feet high—after having comically defended himself against the combined attacks of the Ladies' Committee, good-naturedly consented to be a Pierrot in a scene in which the Vulpini children were to take part; and Sterzl, of whom His Excellency entreated it as a personal favor, agreed, resignedly enough, to be the executioner in a Lady Jane Grey tableau after Delaroche. This tableau was to be the crowning event of the evening. To no other had Barillat devoted such infinite pains. The role of Lady Jane was to be taken by a known English beauty, the Lady Henrietta Stair.

When behold! a day or two before the representation Lady Henrietta sickened with the measles. The perplexity of the committee was extreme on receiving intelligence of this *contre-temps*. That very evening a special meeting, with the co-operation of some lay members, was hastily called together to discuss the matter at an informal tea at Palazzo ———. Every one turned up to a man, save Sterzl, who mortally hated the whole "benevolent business," as he called it, and sent an excuse. Every lady present felt a secret call within her to be Lady Jane. Mrs. Ferguson was, however, the first to put her thought into words and heroically to offer to fill the place of the absent Lady Henrietta.

To the general astonishment Sempaly, who

had hitherto confined his participation in the philanthropic scheme to making the most unmerciful fun of it, now proposing Siemiradzky's Living Torches, now Markart's Entry of Charles V. as the most appropriate tableau, vehehemently negatived this proposition. "Your spirit of self-sacrifice, Mrs. Ferguson, grows more admirable day by day," said he.

"Dear me," replied she, naively, "but what sacrifice is it to have a new historical dress made out of a fashionable old one?"

"That truly is no sacrifice," responded Sempaly, quietly; "but where the sacrifice comes in is for a lady to be willing to show herself in a role so unbecoming as that of Lady Jane Gray would be to you."

Mrs. Ferguson smiled, thereby disclosing her little sharp tiger-like teeth. "Ah! I suppose you are of opinion that I do not possess the *grace touchante* of which M. Barillat is always speaking?"

"As little as *le grace efficace*," returned Sempaly, gravely.

While the ladies were engaged in an animated discussion among themselves Sempaly took the opportunity to whisper a few words in Barillat's ear, who gave a start of pleased surprise.

Going up to Countess Ilsenbergh, he said: "I have an idea to propose to Your Ladyship; I have thought of a substitute."

"Some newly imported American," exclaimed Mme. de Gaudry, laughing, "or a model possessed of infinite grace and golden hair?"

"The ladies may rest satisfied that I would

never venture to propose a model to them," returned Barillat, earnestly. "No, no, I assure you, the lady in question is unexceptionable, and as amiable as she is lovely—Fraulein Sterzl. I made her acquaintance last night at Lady Julia Ellis's; she is an Austrian; your ladyship must have met her?"

"I have not had that pleasure," returned Countess Ilsenbergh, dryly.

"Ah, *Mon Dieu!* the young lady is not eligible," murmured Barillat, embarrassed.

The countess laughed.

"Really!" cried Mme. de Gaudry, irritated at the haughtiness of the Austrian countess, "you take the thing too seriously. Why should the little Sterzl girl not take part in it? Why, I have heard that in Vienna even actresses join in entertainments for charitable objects."

"That is quite another thing," returned Countess Ilsenbergh.

Countess de Gaudry with a shrug of the shoulders turned her attention to other pressing matters, and the Austrian aristocrat motioned to her cousin Sempaly to come to her.

"I am sick to death of the whole affair," she said, as he approached. "In Austria I have assisted times without number at charitable affairs, and they have gone off without a shade of annoyance—but here—"

"Ah, yes. In Austria we manage things very differently," returned Sempaly, feelingly.

"People are so ill-mannered here; every one wants to play first fiddle," said the countess.

"The result of the flowing tide of Republicanism," observed her cousin.

"And then this unpleasantness about the Jane Grey tableau," sighed the countess. "To think that Henrietta Stair should have just taken this time of all others to catch measles."

"Englishwomen are always so inconsiderate," declared Sempaly, gravely.

"Do you happen to have met this Sterzl girl?" asked the countess.

"Yes."

"What is she like?"

"Eh! She is a very pretty girl."

"And besides?"

"And besides—looks just like any other girl of good family. She is really one of Nature's *chef d'œuvres!* and seems equally so on closer acquaintance. Princess Vulpini is quite taken with her."

"Indeed! Barillat seems so set upon having her for Lady Jane Grey, and I suppose he had best have his own way. If Marie Valpini likes to bring the girl to me, we will let it be so."

"My dear Fritzi! What, ask Fraulein Sterzl to take part in your tableaux, without inviting her mother to be present?" said Sempaly, laughing.

"Certainly invite her! Of course only for the theatricals, when the Palazzo ——— is thrown open to Jones, Brown and Robinson, to the combined plutocracy, even to the English clergy and the cosmopolitan world of art."

"With their families, Fritzi? You are really too admirable," said Sempaly, sweetly.

"But the rehearsals are so private," she sighed.

It was growing late.

"Very well, then," said Countess Ilsenbergh, with resignation; and next morning a polite call was made by Countess Ilsenbergh on the Mesdames Sterzl, to solicit Zinka's aid in the Jane Grey tableau.

The countess, being possessed of as great tact as haughtiness, quickly succeeded in reconciling not only Zinka, but even her sensitive and unpliant brother, to the fact that the young girl was only being asked to lend her assistance at the eleventh hour and in the great ladies' dire need.

Cecil, indeed, was by no means taken with the idea of allowing his sister's loveliness to be thus publicly exhibited, and only yielded so as not to spoil her childish delight at the idea of taking part in the "play without words," as she called it. He so worshiped his young sister that he could refuse her nothing.

It was the evening of the fete. The stage had been erected in an enormous gallery, the walls of which were almost entirely covered with mirrors, while from the ceiling, lavishly painted in gold and frescoes, were suspended a row of exquisite Venetian glass chandeliers, blazing with light.

Despite its vast proportions the apartment was crowded to excess. The most distinguished personages were conducted to a carpeted space reserved for the nobility, in front of the remaining, alas! somewhat mixed, assemblage.

Distinguished-looking men leaned against the walls. The whole resembled a sea of many-hued shimmering silks and sparkling jewels.

Princess Vulpini, who, somewhat pale and worn-looking, assisted the countess to do the honors, was moving gracefully among the throng with gracious look and word, while Countess Ilsenbergh did her part with all the queenly dignity that befitted her so well on such occasions.

Few women wore their brilliants with the majesty of Countess Ilsenbergh. This even her irreverent cousin Sempaly was ever ready to admit.

The great success of the evening was not the Musset proverb, in which Countess de Gaudry and the accomplished Barillat played off a fire of brilliant repartee against each other, according to the approved traditions of the Theatre Francais; nor was it the operetta, wherein Mrs. Ferguson looked most fetching, and sang the "Sentier Couvert" to perfection; nor was it even the children's tableau, in which the little Vulpinis looked like a cluster of freshly gathered rosebuds, all smiles and childish loveliness —the great success of the evening was "The beheading of Lady Jane Grey."

The expression of Sterzl's face, wherein lay all the agony of the executioner who worships every hair of the victim's head, was a tragedy in itself. And Zinka! Looking up to heaven with woe-struck face and ecstatic smile, her whole bearing one of saintlike submission, and yet of touching childlike dread—thus it was she

personified to the life the sweet, innocent being before whose grace the very executioner lowered his eyes. A stringed quartette played the Allegretto from Beethoven's Seventh Symphony the while, its melancholy strains forming a fitting accompaniment to the poetry of the whole. Dreamily sweet the lovely Allegretto breathed through the hall, like the slumber song with which an angel wafts some soul still wrestling in mortal agony to the eternal realms of peace.

Villa Medici, the members of which, with their director, had been invited in a body to judge of the artistic effect, agreed that this representation of the picture far exceeded any other that had been given; and, in the overwhelming success of the tableau, the Countess Ilsenbergh entirely forgot all the disagreeables connected with it.

After the collection, which amounted to an unusually large sum, the greater number of the spectators took their departure. Count Ilsenbergh, with dignified smile, the type of feudal philanthropy, had distributed gracious thanks to the gentlemen assisting, and bouquets to the ladies; and now the fete having lost its semi-official character, assumed that of a private soiree. Zinka was sitting in one of the small drawing-rooms surrounded by a group of young French and Roman admirers. Being one of the rare women to whom the adulation of men, personally indifferent to her, afforded not the least pleasure, she was receiving their enthusiastic speecnes with the coolest non-

chalance. She had asked for an ice, and Prince Norina, presenting it on one knee, had availed himself of this attitude of homage to offer some piece of bombastic flattery, to which Zinka, unaccustomed to such Southern exaggeration, had made some annoyed reply, which apparently had had no effect; when Sempaly coming up, said in the abrupt manner he adopted to men of his own age: "Come, get up, Norina! Don't you see that your attentions are unwelcome to the lady?"

Angrily the prince started up; and Sempaly, drawing up a chair beside Zinka, had, as usual, in the next few minutes completely monopolized her attention.

"My cousin is largely indebted to you," he began, in his musical voice. "You were the saving of the whole concern. As a rule I hate and detest amateur shows, but the Jane Grey tableau was simply superb!"

"I enjoyed the proverb so much. Mme de Gaudry acted with such spirit."

"Humph! That kind of spirit has lost its charms for me."

"Indeed!" she laughed. "You seem to me to suffer from a general condition of blasedom."

"And what do you call blasedom?" he asked.

"I? Well, that weariness of heart and soul which seems to be inseparable from the wear and tear of a life of enjoyment, and which belongs, par excellence, to the equipment of a man of fashion."

"'Hm!" exclaimed Sempaly, meditatively. "You mean something between a disease and an affectation?"

"Yes," she answered. "In one word, blasedom is the mundane *croix* of the smart man."

Sempaly shot a searching look into her eyes.

"Your definition is brilliant," said he. "I will make a note of it. But it does not apply to my condition; I am not blase. I do not accept things with indifference. Anything false, or superficially good or beautiful, irritates me; but when I come across what is lovely, noble and genuine, then I assure you I can appreciate and admire it beyond any man."

Meanwhile, the winner of the *prix de musique* from Villa Medici had changed the somewhat pretentious improvisation in which he was indulging to one of Strauss's waltzes.

Countess Ilsenbergh made no objection to the general desire for a dance, and soon several couples were revolving under the light of the brilliant chandeliers.

Sempaly rose. "May I have the pleasure?" he asked, with a low bow; and the next moment Zinka and he were in the ballroom. Instead of growing red when dancing, Zinka's complexion had the more becoming peculiarity of growing still paler; her movements were dreamy and gliding, rather than quick and springing; she waltzed with incomparable grace.

The neophyte's love of rushing through a waltz for the sake of rapid movement was a thing of the past with Sempaly. He now only

danced with women who interested him. This way of his was well known.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Siegburg to General von Klinger, with a meditative shake of the head, as, standing in the recess of a window, the two watched the striking couple, "I am afraid my match with Fraulein Sterzl won't be coming off!"

"Are you not so keen about it now?" asked the general, dryly.

"On the contrary," was the reply; "but I fancy the odds are too strong against me. What's your opinion?" and he gave a meaning look at the old general, who, understanding him, was silent.

"She dances exquisitely. I have never seen a girl dance better. How well she carries her head!" he murmured. Then suddenly a merry light flashed into his sleepy-looking eyes. "Hello! look at Fritzi's face—what consternation! By Jove! Won't there be the devil to pay!"

CHAPTER X.

COUNT SEMPALY was a constant visitor at the Sterzls; he adopted a tone of intimacy with Cecil; did the honors of Rome to Zinka, and lunched or dined with them *en famille* two or three times a week. Since the Ilsenbergh

tableaux Zinka had been asked everywhere. She had become the rage. The men were at her feet; the ladies were eager to learn her *Volks lieder*. The men she treated with indifference; to the ladies she was uniformly pleasant and amiable, more especially to those whom the world slighted, and this increased her popularity. Count Truyn's little daughter—a charming, spoiled child, who regularly gave her maid notice three times a week, wanted to learn everything from Latin to water-colors, and was the torment of all her masters, save Truyn himself — perfectly worshiped Zinka, and would yield to her slightest wish. Princess Vulpini, delighted at her influence over her tom-boy little niece, called her "*une vraie trouvaille*," and Lady Julia Ellis, who had made Zinka's acquaintance two years before at Meran, was proud to have been the first to introduce her to Roman society. Whenever Baroness Sterzl was unable to go out, Lady Julia was ever ready to act chaperon; and Zinka was always expected to pour out tea for Lady Julia at her Wednesday "At Homes," and help her receive her guests.

The Countess Schalingen, a canoness and enthusiastically devoted to the fine arts, replete with that sentimental sense of art which the French call "romance" and not yet a convert to Winterhalter, vowed that Zinka was "delicious"; made expeditions in the environs with her; took her the round of the dealers of antiquities, and finally painted her upon a hand screen for the Princess Vulpini, her head and

bust, enveloped in floating draperies, rising from out the calyx of a lily.

Before a fortnight had elapsed an American had made inquiries about her ancestors, and handsome De Crespigny about her dowry. Prince Norina paid court to her behind the back of his lady love, and Mesdames de Gaudry and Ferguson conferred on her the adulation of immeasurable jealousy. Nor did all this, in any way, turn her head or cause her the least astonishment. From her childhood she had been so used to spoiling. Wherever she had gone she had made friends. She was glad when people were kind to her, though, truth to tell, she would have been vastly surprised had they been anything else.

Sempaly had called her "Botticelli-like," but only with reference to her inner self. Outwardly, Zinka had nothing of the narrow-chested grace of primitive art; rather did she remind one of the pastels of Latour, or of a much later type of the eighteenth century, that of Lamballe. She had never had the conventional coloring of fair women; but in her freshest youth had always been pale, with light, sepia-like shadows under the eyes; her naturally waving hair was that color between golden brown and a warm Venetian red. Growing low upon the forehead, its silky shade softened the contour of the face without concealing the fine brow, thus giving her lovely face an expression of open frankness. She was then without angularity, her arms long and slender, her hands small, and occasionally

rather red. Her variable temperament swayed between meditative dreaminess and merry audacity. Her gait, sometimes light and easy, would be at other times almost awkward, "like an angel dragging its wings," as Sempaly expressed it. Her veiled yet vibrating voice reminded one of the deeper tones of an Amati violin. She could be uproarious as any boy, graceful as a water nymph and naive as a child of six—with that somewhat rough naivete of a girl brought up mostly by men. All her opinions bore the stamp of a dreamy seclusion from the world, an enthusiastic wealth of love.

She had had both French and English governesses, and had spent one year in the convent of the Sacre Cœur; but the person who had most influenced her character had been her guardian, General Sterzl, a clever, somewhat eccentric man, with the most profound antipathy to the sentimental friendships girls are wont to indulge in, and for the life of routine, induced by a too early introduction to the world. To him was due the commendation once awarded to her, by even the great Countess Ilsenbergh:

"One must allow that she has nothing artificial about her; she is as perfectly natural as any of our own girls."

CHAPTER XI.

"Poor Coralie!" the baroness would say, "What a pity she is not here. It would just have suited her!"

"Yes," would Sterzl reply, in his dry way, "she was a little too hasty!"

The said Coralie was the baroness's eldest and favorite daughter. Disappointed in her love for a recalcitrant nobleman, she had some three years before renounced the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, though—worthy child of her mother—not forgetting even in her grief and despair to choose as her refuge a convent in which the nuns were divided into "ladies" and "sisters," and who played cache-cache instead of hide and seek with the children intrusted to their care; also, where the storeroom went by the name of *la depense*.

"Poor Coralie!" the baroness would sigh, and straightway betake herself to her davenport to indite letters overflowing with the delights of their stay in Rome to all her friends and relatives, among others her sister, the Baroness von Wolnitzky. Mme. Sterzl was a type of that category of society especially known in Austria as the "off-shoot" nobility. Austrian "off-shoot" nobility is, as it were, a kind of step-sister to the aristocratic *creme de la creme*—a conglomeration of resigned noble spendthrifts, and of pretentious bourgeois par-

venus, who mutually accommodate each other. In this circle nearly every man is a "baron," and most decidedly every woman a "baroness."

The greater portion of its members are poor, but unquestionably noble. They admonish their children in bad French, and talk "society talk" with their contemporaries in age, in nasal, drawling accents. They give their guests little or nothing to eat, but what there is, is served upon the family plate, and they "receive" the same old fogies year after year, who dye their hair, and know of the "Almanach de Gotha" by heart. They are perfectly up in "society," know every detail of Tiffi X——'s wedding trousseau, how it was that the affair between Steffi O—— and Mucki A—— had come to grief, etc., etc.

True it is that nowadays the "off-shoot" nobility, together with many another growth of civilization, no longer enjoys a separate existence; but, through the ever-increasing spread of Liberalism, is being fast submerged into the great world of finance.

But one short year ago the baroness had had perforce to be content to take up her position on the grand staircase of the opera house to see the aristocratic world defile past her on its way to the grand tier, monopolized exclusively by it, thinking it sufficient to be privileged to pass thus in review the aristocratic toilets and catch the aristocratic nothings falling from aristocratic lips.

In Rome she was one of the "upper ten."

Her delight knew no bounds, while day by day she grew more exclusive. Countess Ilsenbergh was a novice in the art to her.

Perhaps the most comical thing of all was to see her meet any of her less favored countrymen in "society." A Herr Brauer happened to be wintering that year in Rome, an elderly fop with a beautiful young wife, whom he liked to see admired by youthful members of the aristocracy.

Armed with a few letters of introduction he contentedly sunned himself and his charming spouse in the outer fringe, so to say, the Boulevard Exterieur of society, never dreaming the length of the Rue des Martyrs. The baroness never ceased to wonder how "such people" could be received.

She was always well dressed, gave the most recherche little dinners, drove the neatest of coupes, the most luxurious of landaus; her coachman displayed the most faultless of clean-shaven faces, with clear-cut imperial, the most correct of liveries in all Rome. Her manners were ever changing, being an attempt to reproduce as her own those of each leader of fashion by turns.

Disliked in society, the poor woman found it accordingly very dull work; ever on thorns to uphold her social position, she endured the tortures of one standing perpetually on tip-toe.

Her only real pleasure during this period, which she always reckoned the happiest in her life, was the writing the before-named letters home; especially those to her sister, Baroness

Wolnitzky, in Bohemia. She needed to make her triumphs public property, and like all petty natures, knew no greater delight than to excite a spirit of envy in others. Sometimes she would read her epistles aloud to Zinka, for she was proud of her style. Zinka would feel somewhat uneasy at the emphatic sentences, constantly ending with: "What a pity that you are not with us. We should be only too delighted if you could come."

"You had better take care, mamma; they will be taking you at your word and come."

"What silly notions you have," the baroness would reply, contentedly folding her epistolary achievement. "They have not the money."

CHAPTER XII.

A ROW of low-sunken huts with moss-grown roofs, greenish puddles, here and there an old lime tree, or gnarled pear tree whose stunted branches stand out black against the light-green hue of a winter sky; a stagnant pond full to the brim, upon which three solitary geese disport themselves; a muddy, almost impassable road, along which a row of creaking plowshares are being slowly drawn by shaggy farm-horses—and you have the sketch of a Bohemian village, at one end of which stands the tumble-down manor-house with its

coat of arms over the sunken gateway; on one side of which is the pigsty, on the other the dog-kennel. True to the unæsthetic custom of Bohemia, the castle—a square building with shingle-covered attic roofs — stands one side of the farmyard, the drawing-room windows looking direct on to an immense dung-heap, which, at this moment, several maid-servants are engaged in turning over with pitchforks, in which occupation they are being watched over by a short, pinched-up-looking man wearing a weather-beaten foresters' hat and waistcoat, from which the wadding protrudes at the armholes. He is smoking a pipe, the bowl of which is decorated with a gayly painted odalisque, has a very red face and a pair of purple ears, looks anything but aristocratic, and sniggers to himself as he exchanges jokes with the women folk engaged in their unsavory work.

This is Baron Wolnitzky, who, in common with many others, having made himself much talked about in 1848, has since completely disappeared from public life. As with many a withered, barren tree, whose dried-up branches one sees parching away in the dust of a September day, it is difficult to think that he, too, once had his day. In the spring of 1848—that period of universal blossoming forth—Baron Wolnitzky had had his patriotic ideas, which he had set to verse, and his nation had celebrated him as its prophet—perhaps because it needed an idol, perhaps because in that period of excitement it could not discern black from white.

At that time he was wont to wear a costume

of the old Sclavonic period, with sleeves of wonderfully eccentric fashion, and had married a patriotic young lady, who dressed only in Sclavonic colors—blue, red and white; and from that time forth had two youths in Sclavonic dress, with halberds, guarding the door of her residence.

The baron's family, descended some generations back from a wandering Pole, was not highly connected; his means he owed exclusively to his father, who latterly called himself Wolnitzky, and had made his money as a master baker. In feudal times he would scarcely have ventured to bring forward again his doubtful patent of nobility; but in the age of freedom it might serve him in good stead. Such things lend distinction to your Democratic victim.

In the June rising he fled in picturesque disguise with his wife, first to Dresden, thence to Switzerland; lived for some time in a boarding-house at Geneva, where he was looked up to as a political refugee, and where he horrified the mistress of the house by his inordinate appetite, returning later to his native land, where he found that 1848 and its gayly dressed Sclavonic adherents had fallen rather into oblivion.

Retiring to his estate he became a philosopher.

From the time of Diagones philosophy has avowedly been the refuge for unfulfilled pretensions. He went about in his shirt-sleeves and played cards with the peasants. Developed a still larger appetite. Grew more facetious, vulgar and corpulent day by day; and if he

thought about anything it was in the form of an involuntary, heavy dream, following upon the inordinate enjoyment of some favorite national dish. His wife, a square-built, good-natured but ridiculous woman, bore a striking resemblance to the mother of the regent of Orleans, a German, who was possessed of a strong intellect and much sentimentality; she was terribly wanting in tact, hard and cynical, garrulous and indiscreet of speech.

Without a murmur, she conformed to the new prosaic turn of things, and bore a quiver full of children to her husband, most of whom died young. Three were left to them, two sons —who, contrary to the family annals, went into the infantry—and one daughter, in whom the national romance blazed out afresh with redoubled fanaticism. She had been christened Bohuslava, generally abbreviated into "Slava," which euphonistic word in the most important of the Sclavonic tongues stands for "fame." Tall like her mother, but, unlike her, thin, she had even somewhat statuesque features, which, the story went, resembled the Belvedere Apollo.

She had many admirers, but none in exact accord to her wishes. In her twentieth year—she was born in '48—she was passing the winter in the country, unmarried and discontented, dividing her attentions between the study of serious literature and the occasional visits of a dyspeptic young Pole, who cherished a warm admiration for her, and for whom, on her side, she acknowledged some slight amount of condescending interest.

Baron Wolnitzky is still standing beside his dung-heap; the great black cur, who hitherto has been incessantly yelping at the entrance of his kennel, now for a change has sprung on to it, from which elevated position he breaks out into fresh incessant yelps. Everything is saturated with newly melted snow. On all sides is the gurgle and patter of running and falling water. The gray twilight of a late February afternoon is enveloping the earth; all has a dirty, dispirited air. Without, the clumsy wheels of a heavy cart grate upon the road; through the tumble-down gateway lumbers a dung-cart.

"What's the news in the town? Have you bought a paper?" asks the baron of the driver, who, the ears of his round cap tied under his chin, and enveloped in a malodorous sheepskin coat, approaches the master to kiss his elbow.

"Yes, my lord baron," replies the man, "and there's a letter, too." With that he draws out from the pocket of his sheepskin a jacket wrapped in a red flowered handkerchief.

The baron carefully examined the handwriting.

"Another letter from Rome," he mutters, with a grin. "Must take it in to give the women folk something to talk about." The women folk—*i.e.*, the mother and daughter—were sitting in the dining-room, at a long table with a damask cloth, upon which stood the coffee apparatus, as also a petroleum lamp, and a bread basket of tarnished silver wire. The petroleum lamp was smoking, and the whole

interior presented as God-forsaken an appearance as did the forlorn mud-sunken village without.

The baroness in a washed-out dressing-gown, which made her look more shapeless than usual, wearing no cap, her scanty gray hair short cut, was breathlessly seeking, for the tenth time that day, under every chair and table for the keys of the storeroom. Bohuslava was sitting, bending over a volume of Mickiewicz, from which in a rough voice and in somewhat faulty Polish she was reading aloud. A young man, with sharp-cut face, bilious-looking complexion and long black hair, wearing a Polish frogged coat with broad turned-down collar and shiny satin tie of a greenish-brown hue, corrected here and there the pronunciation of a word. He was the Polish admirer, and belonged to the genus of professor of languages with a romantic background; lived in a neighboring village and came over every Saturday to give Bohuslava a lesson in Polish and spend his Sunday with the family.

When the union of this patriotic couple, already secretly pledged to each other, was to take place depended upon the result of a mysterious lawsuit which the young Pole was carrying on with the Russian Government. His name was Vladimir de Matuschowsky, and his great-grandmother had been a Potocka. The while he gave his lessons he brooded over conspiracies.

"Is there nothing more for tea?" asked the baron, eying the assortment of stale rolls in the bread basket askance.

"No; the dogs have eaten up the cakes," answered the baroness, carelessly. She was just then on all fours under the piano, searching near the pedal for the lost key.

"You'll get an apoplectic stroke, mother," said Bohuslava, angrily, though not anxiously, and without making the slightest attempt to help the old lady. At this moment the housemaid appeared, bearing the long-sought key upon an old battered Britannia metal salver.

"Oh, thank goodness!" exclaimed the baroness. Wherever was the thing?"

"In the dog-kennel, my lady. The puppies had carried it off."

Her fondness for dogs was another point of resemblance with the celebrated Duchess of Orleans; she, too, was ever engaged in bringing up some half-dozen pups; and the dog-kennel was looked upon as the storehouse of all kinds and descriptions of lost property.

"What little rascals they are!" she cried, with pleased smile at this fresh display of audacity on the part of her four-footed pets. "Put out the sugar, Clara."

"Got a surprise for you, my lady—a letter from Rome," muttered the baron, pushing the epistle, reeking with patchouli and damp sheepskin, toward his wife, as with the other hand he grasped the rum decanter with which to flavor his tea.

"Ah, ah! from Rome," said the baroness; "that is delightful. Where are my spectacles? where can they be?" searching and feeling all over her portly person, thereby making her

corpulence more evident. "Oh! here they are; I was sitting upon them. Now listen, children," and she began reading her letter aloud:

"Dear Lottie—You must not think it unkind that I do not write oftener" (Mme. Wolnitzky glanced in surprise over her spectacles—"Not oftener? She never in all her life wrote as often to me as she has done from Rome"); "but only think of the whirl in which we live. Not a day passes but there is a dinner-party, one or two soirees and a ball which we are expected to attend. We are spending the Carnival in the midst of the Roman *creme de la creme*, and are quite in society. To-morrow we dine with Princess Vulpini—*nee* Truyn, a sister of the Truyns of Rautschin—the day after to-morrow there are to be amateur theatricals at the ——. Zinka is quite the rage. Among others, Nicki Sempaly, brother to a prince, is paying her such attention—"

Here Wolnitzky broke into his wife's communication:

"I never thought she could be such an old fool," as he drummed impatiently upon the damask teacloth.

"I do not understand Clotilde one little bit," exclaimed the baroness, "and Cecil even less!"

"I give you a piece of good advice, Lottinka," said the baron, ironically. "You make the journey to Rome and set them straight."

"With the greatest of pleasure," answered the baroness, taking his ironical speech in sober

earnest. "But, unluckily, we have not got the cash."

The letter was finished. Like all the others written by Baroness Sterzl to her sister, it ended with: "What a pity that you are not with us; it would be so delightful to have you here."

The meal was over. The maid with great clatter of crockery and jostling of chairs had removed the tray; the baron had withdrawn to have his usual game of bulka at the village inn with the peasants; the others looked thoughtful.

"I must confess I should dearly like to go to Rome," began Mme. Wolnitzka, brushing the crumbs with both hands from her lap on to the floor, "and it would be all the nicer to have one's relations there. As for their fine acquaintances, I don't care one straw for them."

"I don't see, if we were once there, why we should shun society," exclaimed Slava, angrily.

"Oh, well, you could go in for it if you liked," returned the baroness, who had the greatest respect for her daughter. "I should prefer to stay at home. For *voyez-vous, mon cher* Vladimir," she added, turning affably to her prospective son-in-law, "I don't feel altogether comfortable at great entertainments; if I cannot put on my slippers of an evening—"

"*Mais maman,*" cried Bohuslava, indignantly, "*vous etes d'une inconvenance.*"

The baroness paused somewhat intimidated.

Every one was silent. Nothing was to be heard in the room but the crackling of the fire in the great tiled stove and the snoring of the old setter who had made himself a comfortable bed on the skirt of his mistress's dress.

"If we could but find a purchaser for the Bernini," murmured the baroness, resuming the thread of her conversation. The Bernini is a bust of Apollo, one of the treasures inherited by the baroness from her mother, and supposed to be a free copy by Bernini of the Belvedere Apollo. Every time the Wolnitzky family find themselves in a financial crisis the said "Bernini" is dispatched to some fresh curiosity dealer, whence, after a longer or shorter period, it always comes back unsold. A few days since this much-traveled Apollo—he had been to New York, to London and to St. Petersburg—had returned from a twelve-months sojourn at Meyer's of Berlin.

"*Tiens*, Vladimir, you have not seen it yet," exclaimed Slava. "I must show you our Apollo."

"If it be the head that is said to resemble you so strikingly it does greatly interest me," returned the young Pole, with an ardent look at the handsome Slava.

"Bring the lamp; the bust is in the drawing-room."

Bearing the lamp, Vladimir preceded the two ladies into the drawing-room, a large, scantily furnished apartment, only dusted once a month. There, in a corner, on a marble stand, stood the handsome god—clearly a copy

of the Belvedere Apollo, but whether by Bernini—

"The likeness is striking," cried Vladimir, ecstatically, alternately gazing at the bust and then at his *fiancee*. "Oh! it is a work of art; you ought never to part with it!"

"Well, I must say, I would rather go to Rome," sighed the baroness.

Slava merely bit her lips with vexation.

CHAPTER XIII.

"AND what are we going to do to-morrow?" was Sempaly's almost constant inquiry every evening, when he met Zinka in society, smiling and lovely. He had set himself the task of helping her to find her "lost Rome," and was devoting himself to the task with exemplary assiduity.

The disillusion experienced by Zinka as she made her first round among the ruins of the Imperial City, charioteered by her talkative driver, is one of very ordinary occurrence, and experienced by almost every one who, with mind stored with the Roman mysticism of modern literature, for the first time looks upon those ruins, penned in, as are their glories, between the bare, dingy-looking houses of modern growth. And the feeling is the stronger among those travelers who reach Rome after a pro-

longed sojourn in Northern Italy, in Venice or Verona. Of the bewitching grace of North Italian cities Rome possesses absolutely nothing. Its architecture is heavy and gloomy, its coloring in winter mostly a chilly mixture of cold grays and blue-greens, rather reminding one of washed-out water-colors than of the rich tones of paintings in oils. In vain does one long here for the golden reflections of the lagoons, the fantastic stone carvings of Venice, or for the half-effaced frescoes and sunny, amber-toned glories of Verona.

"Rome, after North Italian cities, has the effect upon one of some grand Chorale of Handel, after two entrancing Nocturnes of Chopin. The first impression is disappointing," said Sempaly once to Zinka, "but in time we begin to tire of the Nocturnes—of the Chorale never!"

Upon which Zinka made reply:

"The Chorale is overpowered by so much street-organ music that I have the greatest difficulty in making it out at all."

But with a laugh, he said:

"Tell me a fortnight hence if its tones do not reach you more distinctly."

In a fortnight Zinka had thrown her two *soldi* into the Fontana di Trevi to make sure that this was not her last visit to Rome; and was outdoing General von Klinger in her enthusiasm for everything Roman.

Sempaly had honestly contributed to her conversion. She could not have had a more amusing or interesting cicerone to guide her through

every nook and corner of the beautiful city. He was forever remembering fresh wonders which it was imperative to show her. Now it was some beautiful old bas-relief, that had been clapped on to some orange-hued house over a tobacconist's shop; now the remains of a heathen divinity, figuring in the courtyard of a Catholic convent, and to which some ingenious artist had endeavored to add a pair of angel's wings.

He rode out far into the Campagna with her to show her picturesque portions of the Trastavere. He could find some word of jest or irony for the most solemn things. The halls of the Vatican peopled with statues where a liberal-minded Christian rule has afforded an asylum to pensioned heathendom, he named the City of the Gods; and St. Peter's, called by Italians *la parocchi dei forestieri,* he named the Grand Hotel Catholique. At every sarcophagus converted into a reservoir, every fragment of ancient bas-relief or picturesque heap of ruins, he would recall or invent some half-humorous, half-pathetic historical event bearing upon it, though without the least suspicion of holding forth.

He had a charmingly unpretending art of suggesting, rather than of telling, an anecdote. He never presented it, so to speak, pretentiously upon a salver, but seemed to let it drop carelessly from his lips.

His knowledge of art was not deep; but his feeling for art, as with all his instincts, was most subtle. His knowledge, in fact, on every

point was highly superficial; and, as Charles Lamb expresses it, there was not one whole coat in his intellectual wardrobe. But he could drape himself in his tatters without ever hiding the holes, but with the most consummate grace.

Count Truyn and his little daughter often joined these expeditions, sometimes Cecil also, though he always chose the days when his mother was not of the party. His behavior during these peripatetic athletics, as he called them, was singularly characteristic of the man. Somewhat taciturn, always keenly observant, he would walk beside, or perhaps behind, Sempaly and Zinka. Now and then he would dryly correct the former in his dates, which Sempaly would suffer with most lofty nonchalance and acknowledge—always raising his hat—with regal courtesy. Sterzl only admired the powerful examples of Renaissance school. The Primitives, beloved of Zinka, he smiled at as distorted caricatures; Guido Reni, the Greuze of Italian artists, the Chopin among painters—for whom Sempaly had a slight weakness—was simply repugnant to him. He declared that the headdress of Beatrice Cenci looked like a cold-water bandage; the whole picture a mere study of a head, probably sketched by Guido of some mad woman in a lunatic asylum.

The somewhat mystical and sentimental phraseology occasionally adopted by Zinka when speaking of her favorite antiquities and works of art,he received with a silent, ever good-humored smile, inwardly despising all exaggerations as sentimentality and affectation.

Yet, ever considerate of his sister's feelings, did he see the tears start to her eyes at the sight of a Francia, or did she grow pale and quote Shelley when she spoke of the Florentine Medusa of Leonardo, he would, at most, shrug his shoulders and pinch her ear, as he said:

"Zinka, what a mad child you are!"

Everything in his sister pleased him, even to her want of common sense.

CHAPTER XIV.

Baroness Sterzl had at last found a house in some degree answering to her requirements, a small palazzo in a street leading off from the Corso, "furnished in most execrable taste, but otherwise not objectionable."

The palazetto was a treasure in its way, with simple, noble-looking Renaissance facade, and an arcade inclosing a courtyard, in the center of which was a plashing fountain, overshadowed by red camelias. Some fine old half-destroyed statues stood about; among others the well-known one of the Wounded Amazon, at the feet of which blossomed a rose bush.

Zinka found this Amazon most picturesque, and sketched it under its every imaginable aspect in her album, without ever under-

standing the prophetic sadness of her expression.

Poor Zinka! She was blinded by the sunlight in her eyes. How could Cecil allow this daily increasing intimacy between Sempaly and his sister? Sempaly's eldest brother, the prince, had been married for ten years and had no children; thus the attache, as his probable heir, was constrained to make a suitable alliance.

Was Sterzl not aware of this fact? He did know it, but gave it no further thought. That the marriage of a girl of the middle class with a Count Sempaly was an affair of no every-day occurrence he was well aware; nor did he particularly desire that it should become so. He was no democrat, but old-fashioned, very peculiar, and conservative in his views, as far removed from sycophancy as from envy of those of higher rank than himself. That Sempaly should have married any other girl in his sister's station in life would undoubtedly have struck him as a very singular proceeding. But Zinka—Zinka was a girl of girls. He worshiped her as only a strong elder brother can worship a young, delicate sister. To his mind no social position was too high for her.

And seeing Sempaly smile down, at once so affectionately and deferentially, on his beloved little "butterfly," as he called his sister, he rejoiced in her happiness and cherished no misgivings.

CHAPTER XV.

ZINKA was not sentimental. Her intercourse with Count Sempaly had proceeded for some time without exciting in her the trace of any deeper feeling. One merry speech followed another, while her eyes would sparkle with wanton mischief. Gradually, however, there came a change; her manner grew softer and sweeter, a most bewitching lauguor would invade even her merriest moods, and in the midst of laughter there would be the glistening of tears in her eyes. Sempaly's visits to the palazetto became irregular; sometimes for two, even three days he came not, then again he would enter an appearance at noon, merely invite himself to lunch, drive out with the ladies of the house, accept an unceremonious invitation to dine with them *en famille*, and did Zinka look pale or seem any way depressed, would exert himself by all manner of affectionate attention and consideration to charm back the bright smile to her lips. Sometimes affecting melancholy, he would tell of his loveless childhood, and excite her compassion. He would speak of his elder brother, dilate upon his many excellencies, ending up with a shrug of the shoulders: "Yes; he is a fine fellow, but—he has his peculiarities."

Did Zinka ask what were these peculiarities? he would only sigh, sometimes adding: "Ah,

well, I hope you will make his acquaintance one day, then you can judge for yourself." But this was always said in a half-hearted way, and as if repenting having said it.

Sometimes speaking of some particular picture in the Sempaly collection in Vienna, or of some other family possession, he would say how he hoped some day to be able to show them to Zinka.

He loved best to talk to her of Erzburg. This old castle, the summer resort of the Sempalys for generations, was especially dear to him. Otherwise he was entirely free from family predilections—would call the Sempaly palace an unhealthy barrack; would scoff at the Sempaly stud; make merry over the shape of the family nose, and mockingly praise the traditional Sempaly tokay; but once touch upon Erzburg, and he waxed enthusiastic. To the Oriental luxury with which a great portion of the castle was furnished—perhaps not strictly in good taste—he never alluded; it was perhaps rather upon the deficiencies of Erzburg, than of its advantages, that he would descant; but then in such a tender, deprecating tone! He would tell of the great, bare apartments in which for years, half lovingly, half shudderingly, he used to expect, always vainly, to see the White Lady appear; would tell of the melancholy creak of the weather-cock, of the old rococo statues in the park, and of the gentle, murmuring sound of the lakes, covered with pale water lilies.

He would allow that the ornamental statues were worthless, the stagnant pools unhealthy;

the while there would be a kind of reverence in his usually mocking eyes. Once when Zinka had grown quite sad over his varied recitals, he took her hand and, pressing it tenderly to his lips, murmured: "You must learn to love Erzburg."

His demeanor to Zinka was that of a man who has made up his mind as to the step he is about to take, but who, at the present moment, is not at liberty openly to ask the hand of the girl whom in his inmost heart he has already selected for his wife. What was he really aiming at in all this? What were his intentions? To my mind he had none. He simply allowed himself to drift. There are such selfish, sybaritic men who suffer themselves to float along the stream of life, never taking the trouble to lift a hand to guide the rudder. For the most part happily constituted, they usually gain a harbor without having suffered any serious harm to themselves, and if perchance on their passively egotistical course they may have happened, all smiling and good-humored, to have run down some less fortunate life's bark, with a carelessly amiable "beg pardon" they pass on, fully persuaded that fate, and not their doing, has been the cause of the mishap.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was toward the end of February, shortly before the close of Carnival, that Count Truyn and his little daughter, calling to take Zinka for a walk, saw a cab with portmanteau upon it standing at the door of the Sterzls' palazetto; while Cecil's valet, a very correct young man, with carefully brushed hair and smooth-shaven upper lip, short whiskers and imposing watch chain, stood by it exchanging a few condescending words with the driver and blinking sleepily in the sunlight.

The drawing-room to which Truyn and his little companion made their way unannounced was filled with a bluish-white radiance, the unhindered sunbeams causing innumerable atoms to pursue their dazzling dance. Zinka stood in the center of the room resting both hands on the table, bending over a magnificent basket of flowers. The somewhat quaint grace of her attitude, the exquisite lines of her bust, the bewitching loveliness of her smiling yet agitated face, added to the softness of the white-flowing gown she wore—made a picture which Truyn never forgot. A sunbeam nestling in her hair revealed it in all its golden beauty, her whole figure was radiant with a sweet, intense, spring-like felicity. The flower basket was, moreover, a marvelous production, a wealth of lilies-of-the-

valley, gardenias, snow-drops and pale-pink roses, as though borne thither by the coating breath of the spring breezes.

Sterzl stood beside her, a good-humored smile upon his face; the baroness, the picture of astonished affectation, a little apart, was holding a visiting card in her hand. Neither brother nor sister—he absorbed in looking at her, she at the flowers—had heard Truyn's entrance. The baroness alone had "come in" in response to his knock, and now offered him the tips of her fingers, lisping, as she waved her hand toward the exquisite floral achievement: "Can you conceive such extravagance?"

Hereupon, Zinka looking up, welcomed him affectionately, as did Sterzl.

"It is quite too foolish—too extravagant," sighed the baroness anew; "a basket of flowers like that must have cost a fortune. Why, a single gardenia—"

Zinka scornfully pursed her lips, while Sterzl remarked with his dry humor: "Pray do not dispel Zinka's illusions, mother; the basket is heaven-sent to her; it is useless to tell her that it is only one of many others exposed for sale in the Via Condotti or the Babuino. What do you think, count? Sempaly sends it to console her for her brother's departure. Rather a far-fetched reason—his usual fine speech-making—don't you think so? I don't think that you will mind my being away for a day or two so very much—eh, butterfly?" and he put his hand affectionately under her chin.

"Where are you off to so suddenly?" asked Truyn, gravely.

"To Naples. Franz Arnsperg wired me to meet him there, if possible. He is a great friend of mine, has just been transferred from Constantinople to Paris, and is making the detour by way of Naples on purpose to meet me."

"He is an Arnsperg-Meiringen, you know, whose estates lie near ours," interpolated the baroness.

Sterzl, well aware that Count Truyn must know far more about the Arnsperg-Meiringens than his mother did, listened to her speech with annoyance and embarrassment; but kissing her hand in farewell, he said, turning to his sister: "God bless you, butterfly. Is it too much to ask for a few lines from your fly-away pen while I am away?" Then as he kissed her, he added in a low voice: "Mind, child, that I find you looking as bright and happy when I come back."

Truyn, who accompanied Sterzl to his cab, still looked very grave. He and General von Klinger had for some time been watching Sempaly's doings with serious uneasiness, knowing, as they both did, his impulsive nature, so easily affected by the feeling of the moment. Truyn's only reason for not having spoken to Sempaly on the subject hitherto had been that, knowing his temperament, he had feared only still further to excite his opposition, without obtaining any good results; while the general, being possessed of the Stockmar repugnance to

mix himself up in affairs that did not actually concern him, was equally averse to open Sterzl's eyes to the state of things. The dread of committing one's self is society's shield for leaving things alone.

CHAPTER XVII.

It is Shrove Tuesday. The most dejected-looking cab-hack to-day displays a paper rose behind his ear, although during Carnival-time one-horse vehicles are treated as pariahs, and are not permitted to drive along the Corso. Two-horse carriages on hire have an immunity, and are to be seen decorated with garlands of flowers, the horses proudly displaying a tuft of feathers on their heads. The Piazza di Spagno is overflowing with flowers and Moccolo sellers, while strangers from all parts are eagerly bargaining with them. There are baskets innumerable of violets, roses, anemones and stocks, and, again, other baskets filled with indescribable bundles of decayed vegetables. Carnival store, which, having done duty for the past three days, now look more like the handfuls of green stuff used by our maids to rub their boards with than once gay flowers.

Coral and tortoise-shell stall-keepers call to the passers-by: "Come, buy—buy—*e carne-*

vale," and in side streets (for poverty to-day is banished from the principal streets and squares) beggars are more than ever rife, pressing up to busy pedestrians with their mournful "*muojo di fame.*"

The Corso wears to-day its most festive garb. From every balcony flutters a colored hanging; numberless stands have been erected; window-sills are draped, some with gay-colored bunting, others with gold-embroidered brocades.

Thursday, Saturday and Monday Zinka and Gabrielle, escorted by Count Truyn, have driven unweariedly for hours up and down the Corso, throwing bouquets at friends and strangers alike. To-day they have decided to watch the proceedings from one of the windows of Palazzo Vulpini, as Carnival assumes a riotous aspect toward the close. All who reside on the Corso seize the opportunity to pay off old debts, and invite as many guests as can be conveniently crowded into the different windows.

A goodly assemblage had collected at Princess Vulpini's, for the most part consisting of the Italian relatives of the prince. Mesdames de Gaudry and Ferguson were there, self-invited, and Zinka and Gabrielle Truyn. Baroness Sterzl was suffering from *tic douloureux*, which prevented her going out, more to her own than to any one else's regret. At six o'clock, before the battle of Moccoli, they were all to repair to the Falcone, a renowned Roman restaurant, where they would dine better and more comfortably than at home; thence to go to the

mask ball at Teatro Constanzi. This truly Roman Carnival programme had been devised by Prince Vulpini in special honor of the Countess Schalingen, who was a passionate admirer of everything Roman and was enchanted at the local color thus given to it. The princess submitted with resignation—she felt no interest in Roman local color, and had an invincible mistrust of the Italian national cuisine and of masquerade license.

It is three o'clock. Baskets heaped with flowers, and boxes of tempting-looking bonbons stand invitingly ready in every window.

The little Vulpinis, to whom the big double window in the great drawing-room has been assigned, are now led in by their black-garbed, shy-looking English governess. They hop in on one leg and pull each other's hair in their impatience and happy expectation. As the governess in low voice reproves these bad manners, the eldest replies: "*Ma e carnevale*," at which all the guests laugh, and the Englishwoman subsides.

Now all the company has assembled. Mesdames de Gaudry and Ferguson both look charmingly picturesque, the first wearing a fez, the second a gold-embroidered Eastern muslin draped round her head in honor of Carnival, which allows any bccoming eccentricity and only wages war against conventional head-coverings. Leveled from windows into carriages, from carriages to windows, fly the fragrant projectiles, pretty bonbonnieres from Spillman and Mazzari whirl in among

them, dainty paper devices, many-hued, lightly folded, quiver through the air.

From the Piazza di Venezia comes the incisive sounds of a military band. Processions of masqueraders mix in among the carriages.

One of the most animated windows in all the Corso was undoubtedly the children's window in Palazzo Vulpini. Zinka stands in the midst of the little group, having at their pressing solicitation undertaken the guardianship of the little people so devoted to her.

She and Gabrielle vie with each other in merriment, finding time amid their fun to show the shy English governess many a kind attention, even to fastening one of the freshest bunches of lilies-of-the-valley in the front of her sober black silk dress, redolent of camphor. Of course the greatest attraction of all to the children is Norina's drag, because they not only know the *principe* who holds the ribbons, but also the gentlemen with him—Counts Truyn, Siegburg and Sempaly. When his team of four dun-colored horses pass, the little Vulpinis literally jump with delight and twitter together to such a degree until their window sounds for all the world like a big bird cage; and the gentlemen laughingly raise their hats and aim and throw with chivalrous skill countless bonquets into the windows of Palazzo Vulpini.

The most lovely flowers to-day, however, are unquestionably showered upon Zinka. The ground about her is strewn with violets, stocks and roses. She holds a huge bouquet of roses

in her hand. It is Sempaly who has thrown them to her.

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed Mme. de Gaudry, retreating from her window to rest a while and recruit her flagging powers with a glass of wine. "Why, mademoiselle," she says, eying Zinka's floral wealth with a look of envy. "The men have been giving you an ovation like any prima donna!"

Zinka nods; then bending with comical distress over her hat, fallen off her head in the excitement of the battle, and arranging its feathers, she says: "My poor hat will be glad to see Ash Wednesday."

"Delightful, Marie, perfectly delightful is your Roman Carnival—a never-to-be-forgotten sight!" cried Countess Schalingen, drawing back into the room. A thorough Austrian, she is ever ready to go off into ecstacies.

"Bah!" returns the prince. "With this new Government, Carnival has degenerated into a mere display for foreigners and street boys."

The Berberi have dashed past, the procession has recommenced, but without exciting further interest. The hubbub in the street below has somewhat subsided, and Sempaly, Truyn, Norina, Siegburg and the general have come to Palazzo Vulpini as arranged, to escort the ladies to the Falcone.

The children have been kissed and sent upstairs to their dinner, Gabrielle a little tearful at not being allowed to go with the grown-ups, her father somewhat unhappy at his little com-

rade's disappointment. Zinka had begged to stay with the children to console her little friend, but this had not been allowed.

"Too many of us would want to follow your example," Princess Vulpini had said, dejectedly, to whom this notion of an exodus to a Roman restaurant was becoming more and more distasteful.

The party are to go on foot, and begin to make preparations to start. Thanks to the many plans and counterplans the one quiet period of Carnival before the battle of Moccoli has been suffered to slip by. As they emerged into the street, the crowd at one time lessened, had now grown dense again. Twilight descends like a gray veil upon the city. The gay-colored, inflammable draperies have been withdrawn from windows and balconies; Carnival is divesting itself of its ball dress. The first reddish-hued flames begin to glisten like fireflies through the twilight, and are as instantly assailed by a hailstorm of hard Mazetti and vegetables, principally from the streets.

"*Fuori, fuori,*" is the monotonous chant, followed by "*Senza moccolo vergogna!*"

The climax of Carnival has begun. The situation is anything but agreeable to our Austrians, who can neither protect the ladies of their party from being pushed about in the crowd, nor deaden their ears to the course wit flying about among the people.

At length they have succeeded in threading their way out of the Corso; have lost each other in by-streets, some going by the way of

the Via Maddalena, others across the Piazza de la Rotunda, and finally, after various small excitements, have reached the Falcone, the ladies' toilets looking all the worse for the struggle, Princess Valpini more dejected than ever.

The Falcone is an unpretentious house, where the waiters wear white jackets instead of the decorous dress coat. Its prices are reasonable, its *resotto* celebrated. Prince Vulpini orders an Italian dinner in one of the upper rooms. Suddenly Count Truyn exclaims uneasily:

"Where are Zinka and Sempaly?"

"They must have stopped chatting on the way," says Mme. de Gaudry, with slightly puckered lips, as leaning back in her chair she draws off her gloves. "People always lag behind when they have something to say to each other."

Truyn frowns. "I greatly fear that they have got into some crush and have been unable to make their way out. I always thought this an absurd expedition. I really cannot think, Marie, how you could have dreamed of such a thing—"

"I?" returned his sister in a dispirited voice and with a speaking look. Then she is silent. He knows perfectly that she is as innocent of having planned this pleasure-party as an angel in heaven.

"*Mais qu' avez-vous donc?*" growls Prince Vulpini, showering the parmesan into his soup, while Mrs. Ferguson plaintively asserts that she is starving, a somewhat incredible asser-

tion in view of the quantity of bonbons she has consumed since lunch. Mme. de Gaudry asks for all possible and impossible Paris delicacies, which the Falcone knoweth not.

Countess Schalingen commends Italian cookery, and laments that she has no appetite.

Anxiously Truyn and the general keep their eyes upon the entrance door. Zinka and Sempaly have not appeared—Truyn conceals his uneasiness less and less effectually. "I cannot conceive why you should excite yourself to such an extent, count," observes Mme. de Gaudry, with perfidious smile. "If Fraulein Sterzl is a little behind hand, Sempaly will take good care of her. Now, had she been intrusted to any one less reliable, any one with whom she is less intimate—then, of course, I could understand—"

Here Truyn, passing his hand uneasily over his iron-gray hair, mutters in his native German: "This woman will be the death of me!" and continues to heap reproaches on his sister. Another quarter of an hour goes by. Despite the somewhat slow waiting the party have arrived at dessert. Still no sign of Zinka and Sempaly.

"I begin to feel seriously uneasy," says the princess. "I trust the poor child has not fainted in the crowd."

Mme. de Gaudry, drawing down the corner of her lips, scornfully murmurs: "It would be the wisest thing she could do, I should say."

Truyn hears the abominable insinuation, and bites his lip.

Then the door opens and Zinka and Sempaly

enter—she with glad, serene eyes, he looking somewhat annoyed.

"Thank Heaven!" cries Truyn.

"Whatever has happened to you?" asks the princess, as Truyn draws up a chair for Zinka beside his sister.

"What has happened to us?" answers Sempaly, irascibly; "the most natural thing in the world. We got into the thick of the crowd, and could not make our way out again."

"Is not that a little peculiar?" observed Mme. de Gaudry, with a meaning smile. "We all managed to get through."

"Perhaps you may remember that we were the last of the party, countess. We had hardly gone twenty steps when the crowd before us became denser; we hurried on, tried to force a way through—I could have done it easily alone, but with a lady— Suddenly there broke out a volley of abuse and recrimination; oaths, blows, dagger thrusts ensued, etc. I cannot describe the hateful situation in that throng with a lady—a young girl under my protection!"

"Fraulein Sterzl appears to have taken the situation much more calmly than you, Count Sempaly," interposed Mme. de Gaudry, maliciously; "the adventure does not seem to have caused her any alarm."

"Fraulein Zinka was very plucky," replied Sempaly.

"Why should I have been afraid?" asked Zinka, her eyes full of the naive unconsciousness of perfect innocence; "Count Sempaly was responsible for our safe passage, not I."

Mme. de Gaudry gave a mocking laugh. "I suppose we must be going," said she, "if we are to get to the Costanzi to-night."

There followed a pushing back of chairs; a confusion of general offers of assistance; a general mixed condition of the ladies' wraps.

Princess Vulpini made no sign of leaving her chair. "I shall do no more to-night," she said, very energetically for her; "I shall not take Zinka to the Costanzi. I shall simply wait here with her until she has had something to eat, and then drive her home. I wish the rest of the party a pleasant evening."

Zinka demolished her beef-steak with the greatest composure and best of appetites, was happy, contented and affectionate as ever, and had not the least idea that her name, next day, would be in every one's mouth.

Truyn, however, was pale and uneasy. He had plainly heard Mme. de Gaudry whisper to her friend: "Now the banns must follow."

BOOK SECOND

LENT.

CHAPTER I.

"GLAD to find you at home!" exclaimed Count Truyn the next morning to Sempaly, whom he found, book in hand, in the act of winding up his *dejeuner a la fourchette* with the customary cup of coffee. His suite of bachelor apartments was in the Palazzo Venezia.

"Glad to see your unsociable self here at last," replied Sempaly. "I will show you my new Francia—that is, the dealer who sold it me swore it was a Francia— But you look preoccupied. What, may I ask, brings you here?"

"I merely looked in to ask if—'hm!—you were driving to Frascati with us this afternoon?"

"To Frascati this afternoon? My dear fellow, what an idea!" returned Sempaly, amazed. "Anyway, it would be quite impossible; I am engaged to go to the Palatine with the Sterzls at three."

"Ah!" exclaimed Truyn, his face assuming a serious expression.

"May I offer you a cup of coffee?" asked Sempaly, carelessly.

"No, thank you," returned Truyn, dryly.

Visibly discomposed, he busied himself examining the various knick-knacks while regaining his composure. Accidentally he took up the book Sempaly had been reading on his entrance. It was the Essays of Elia. Upon the title-page was written in a large, firm handwriting:

"In friendly remembrance of a serious quarrel. ZINKA STERZL."

"The child lost a bet with me a little while ago," explained Sempaly. "There is a second still pending, to be decided at the Palatine today."

Truyn, closing the book emphatically, laid it down. Then, leaning his elbows on the table, by which he had seated himself, and looking Sempaly earnestly and searchingly in the face, said:

"Do you intend to marry that girl?"

Sempaly started.

"What the devil do you mean!" he cried. But on Truyn remaining silent and still continuing to look scrutinizingly at him, he suddenly assumed a defiant air. Challenging his cousin with an angry look he said, roughly:

"And suppose I do?"

"Then I trust you will not be wanting in the

necessary determination to carry out that intention," replied Truyn; "for in such a case to stop half way is nothing short of a crime!" Breathing heavily, his eyes sought the ground.

Far from clearing, Sempaly's face clouded over still more. He had counted upon violent opposition, but his cousin's quiet, well-nigh encouraging tone of acquiescence caused him to feel like a man who, having strained every nerve to lift a heavy block of iron, finds it instead to be a piece of cardboard, light as a feather. He lost all self-control. "Upon my soul," cried he, furiously, "you speak as calmly as if it were a matter of choosing a partner for a cotillion. In plain speaking, the thing is simply an impossibility. What should we have to live upon? I have long ago run through my own money; my brother, did I commit such a step, would cut me off with a shilling; and Zinka is not of age. I certainly might take to selling wax tapers at the corners of the streets in order to keep my wife, which would have the immense advantage of causing my mother-in-law to disown me. Or do you suppose me capable of allowing myself to be supported by Frau Clotilde Sterzl during Zinka's minority?"

"Well," observed Truyn, very calmly, "seeing that you take such a common-sense view of the impossibility of marriage with Zinka, I must

say that your conduct toward her is altogether unjustifiable." Truyn was still sitting by the little table, on which stood the choice coffee service, while Sempaly, his hands in his pockets, was striding angrily up and down the room with the air of a man who knows himself to be in the wrong, and ever and anon knocking up against some piece of furniture in his way.

"I can't make you out!" he cried suddenly, stopping short irately before his cousin. "Sterzl has never expressed the slightest exception to my conduct; and I think he stands in somewhat closer relation to Zinka than you do!"

Truyn slightly changed color at these words; but quickly recovering self-command, he replied:

"Sterzl, despite all his outward straightforwardness, is an idealist, who would strive to bring down the very stars from heaven for his sister. He has not the remotest doubt but that you entertain the most honorable intentions toward her."

"Don't tell me such stuff," growled Sempaly.

"But such is the case," insisted Truyn.

"Poor fellow! he thinks his sister a match for any one."

"And, by Jove, he is right," exclaimed Sempaly, "perfectly right. But I am fettered by circumstances—the claims of birth."

He had seated himself upon the sill of one of the deep embrasured windows, his elbows on his knees and face sunk in his hands, and was now gazing moodily before him.

"But allow me this one question, what is the cause of your mixing yourself up in this afiair?"

"I have long had it at heart," responded Truyn. "The immediate cause that constrains me to speak to you to-day is that Mrs. Ferguson and Countess de Gaudry, before you reached the Falcone last evening, allowed themselves to make remarks of a nature to assure me that your continued attentions to Zinka were beginning to affect her reputation!"

"As if it were necessary to trouble one's self about the opinion of such people!" cried Sempaly, wrathfully. Then went on to talk about his responsibilities, in which what one owes to one's position, care of one's property, etc., came in.

A look of icy contempt passed over his cousin's handsome face. After listening for a while to the specious pleadings, he broke in with:

"No fencing, I beg. The matter is perfectly simple. Do you love Zinka?"

The attache drew his eyebrows together. "Yes," he murmured, half angrily.

"Very good. And you lack the courage to

face the disagreeables that would result from union with her?"

Sempaly was silent.

"Then, my dear fellow," resumed Truyn, "there remains but one alternative; that is, to break off your intimacy with Zinka as gently, but as rapidly, as possible."

"That I neither can nor will do!" retorted Sempaly, stamping his foot.

"If within three days you have not taken the necessary measures to get yourself transferred to some other embassy, I shall feel myself compelled either to give Sterzl a hint how things are going—or your brother—whichever you may prefer," said Truyn, resolutely. "Good-morning."

"Good-morning," returned Sempaly, without moving.

Truyn strode toward the door. On the threshold he turned, saying, somewhat hesitatingly: "Don't take it amiss, Nicki. I could not act otherwise. Think, my dear fellow. Duty is a bitter morsel to swallow, but has a pleasant after-taste!"

CHAPTER II.

"Poor girl! poor lovely child!" murmured Truyn, as he descended the gray marble steps of Palazzo di Venezia. "To prate now of the claims of birth, of stress of circumstances, of national economy—now. Good heavens!" He lit a cigar, then threw it hastily from him. "Bah! To meet a girl like Zinka—be loved by her—and to be a free man!"

He emerged hastily on the piazza. The house porter, standing at the entrance, marveled that the count, usually so courteous, passed him by this time without acknowledging his respectful salutation. Such a thing had never happened before since he had known him.

He was a strange fellow, this young gray-headed Count Truyn. Brought up amid the happiest of home circumstances, hurried against his better convictions into a marriage with the handsome Princess Gabrielle Zinsenburg, he had never been able to reconcile himself to the superficial worldly nature of his married life with the cold, heartless woman, who, some years older than himself, had never rested until

she had succeeded in bringing about a marriage with him.

A few years later they had mutually agreed to an amicable separation. He had given her his name, she gave up to him their child. His life was spoiled. Condemned to shut up the wealth of affection his warm, noble heart would fain have lavished, his spirit grew more and more despondent. His love for his child, great as it was, did not suffice to give his life the active interest it needed; through all his being there ran a chord of harsh dissonance. Having for years lived more or less abroad, his ideas had widened to the complete surrender of many a true Austrian prejudice. Yet he was looked upon as reactionary in Austria, because he always voted with his party; in truth, he was not reactionary, but merely profoundly indifferent to politics in general. He smiled alike at the unscrupulousness of the Left, the enthusiasm of the Right; and the perfecting of the Constitution he considered, in his heart, to be a thankless office. He was far from satisfied with the order of the world, but to his mind it needed to be thoroughly regenerated before things could be mended; and mankind has no desire to be regenerated, its sole idea being that of mutual recrimination and abuse, and he found no satisfaction in either. Instead of proclaim-

ing sonorous theories, he eased his heavy heart by countless deeds of benevolence. The exhibition of Sempaly's undecided, time-serving nature to-day had thoroughly disgusted him.

"How can a man," he meditated, "be at once so much in love and yet be such a coward? By heavens! he is the greatest egotist I ever came across. A thorough, deep-dyed epicurean, with only feeling enough for the enjoyment of his own sensations."

CHAPTER III.

THE bet pending between Zinka and Sempaly was not decided that afternoon. Sempaly did not go to the Palatine, but, at the last moment, sent a note of apology to Zinka.

Although not caring to confess it to himself, Truyn's words had made a great impression upon him. Struggle as he might against it, there remained but one thing for him now, to consider the situation in earnest. The idea of effecting an exchange, of breaking with all his beloved sauntering habits, was unbearable. He felt as though some one had roughly endeav-

ored to rouse him from a state of delicious half-sleep filled with pleasant dreams, from which he had no desire to wake. Was there really no alternative? Certainly, Truyn had suggested one to him. He had it in his power, had he energy enough, to convert the pleasant, vague dream into a wonderful, living reality. His whole being thrilled with delirious joy as the thought alluringly presented itself.

He was past the age in which a young man is ready to commit any folly, to believe in the conversion to moral ways of some celebrated music-hall singer, or to marry his sister's governess, twelve years older than himself. If he looked seriously at the possibility of marriage with Zinka, it was because he knew his feeling for her to be no fleeting passion, but that it had taken root in his innermost being. All the pleasures of life had been his to enjoy, and he was sated with them. What sufficed the other young men of his surrounding, to afford them the desired *quantum* of excitement necessary to give every man an interest in life, merely disgusted his more refined nature. For years life had been stale, unprofitable to him; then he had suddenly come in contact with Zinka—

And now he felt as though the sweet spirit of spring had breathed through his cold, empty

soul, charming sweet flowers into blossom and making mad, delicious disorder there. Once more he felt the "sweet pain of existence." And was he now to condemn all that sweet blossoming to untimely death?

"Break off all intercourse with her—leave Rome. No, a thousand times no! I cannot and will not do it!" he angrily muttered, always coming back to the same thing. "What the devil does it matter to Truyn? Who is he, that he should have the right to order me what to do, or what not to do?" he stormed. And yet the resolve to let things slide, to bask, fancy free, in Zinka's smiles, and exult in her beauty and unconscious preference, as formerly, now seemed tinged with a feeling of discomfort. He felt that it had become impossible. His heart, hitherto dumb, had learned to speak and to exact. To attempt to still it by any such hollow make-believe was like trying to quench an insatiable thirst with the dew-drops on a rose.

He suddenly loved her—passionately, madly. He had ever tired so quickly of so-called interesting women: for the most part like rain-troubled streams whose shallowness was not, at first, apparent, because in the storms of life they had lost their purity and clearness. But Zinka resembled a mountain lake, whose waters are so clear that from its shores every

little stone in its depths can be counted; ever less transparent the further one goes, its deep, mysterious depths, still clear, but unfathomable; until, finally, despite their crystal purity, their depths can no more be seen than that of the blue sky above us. He felt as though that lake, at its deepest, contained a treasure which one man only, favored of Heaven, was destined to obtain.

How alluring to dive into that lake! She seemed made for him: never had he experienced a dull moment with her; heart and head alike were satisfied. All the many contradictory phases of her character fascinated him. He had once told her she was "a pocket edition of womanhood," so many and varied were her attributes. The unexpected expression of some deep thought in the midst of a burst of child-like frolic, her periods of wild audacity, followed by dreamy melancholy, her little capricious egotisms and spirit of great devoted self-sacrifice, the spontaneous grace of her every movement, her soft melting voice—

Should he, really? No. Impossible. Truyn was right: he must leave Rome. The sooner the better. Taking up his hat he went to Palazzo Chigi to see the embassador and arrange for an exchange. His Excellency was out.

Dispirited, he turned into the club, lost several games of ecarte and grew still more dejected. Going home he kept consulting his watch, as if in expectation of something; his agitation increased from minute to minute.

CHAPTER IV.

Vieni Maggio, Vieni prunavera.—*Roman Stornello.*

Come month of May, come Spring's sweet time!
When trees burst forth in tender leaf,
When, love, to thee, my heart I gave
And thou didst vow to guard it well.
Plunge in that heart thy dagger cold;
I will not flinch from thy dear hand;
And what thou seekst thou'lt surely find—
A heart all thine, and thine alone.

THESE simple words in Roman dialect, set to a most pathetic melody, were wafted from the open windows of Palazetto M——, as Sempaly passed by that evening.

In order to divert his thoughts he had decided to pay some calls. He had no reason to go through the quiet side street in which the palazetto was situated; but he could not resist going out of his way to do so. The night was

warm. Tenderly, softly the tones were wafted to him. He recognized Zinka's voice, and in the song one of those melancholy *stornelli* in which the peasants of the Campagna pour out their griefs. The song ceased. He was going on his way when another still sweeter, even more touching, broke the dreamy silence:

"Wouldst see me die? Ah, painless death,
The poison thy dear hand doth give!
My sepulcher within the shrine
Of thy dear heart, beloved, shall be."

The tender words were sung in a voice vibrating with somber pathos, like a spray of lovely fading spring flowers borne away upon the depths of some dark, melancholy river. He turned back, listening with strained attention, feeling as if he would give all he possessed to hear it once more—if but the last line.

"La sepoltura mia sara il tuo seno!"

Then he heard Zinka's voice talking to some one, and felt irritated that he could not distinguish what she was saying. Ah! why torture himself thus beneath her windows?

To his immense astonishment, Sterzl came forward to meet him as he entered the drawing-room.

"What, back already?" he cried, as, after

greeting Zinka, he affectionately shook hands with him.

"Yes. Arnsberg could only stay a couple of days at Naples," replied Sterzl. "I was delighted to see him, but—well, I must be getting into the sere and yellow leaf or I should not feel so glad to be home again," and, drawing his young sister to him, he gently stroked her pretty, fair head. This expression of brotherly affection tended still further to increase Sempaly's agitation.

"I am not surprised that your home should be so dear to you," he murmured, as the baroness came in, an opera cloak on her shoulder, a scent-bottle and delicate handkerchief in her hand, and, as usual, at the last gasp of excessive elegance.

"Not ready yet, Zenaide? Ah! you here, dear count? *Voila qui est gentil!*" giving him the tips of her gloved fingers. "We were so uneasy about you. You gave up the proposed walk so suddenly that Zinka was quite in alarm lest you had caught Roman fever," she said, in her mincing manner.

"Zinka rejoices in distressingly lively powers of imagination," interposed Sterzl, smilingly.

"I quite thought there must be some grave reason for your change of plan," said Zinka, hurriedly, and with some embarrassment.

Sempaly looked her full in the face. "I had but imposed a Lenten penance upon myself," he said, in a low voice.

"To complete your penance, then, you should come with us now to Lady Dalrymple's," said the baroness, with insinuating smile.

"Oh, anything but that! Grant me dispensation. I had been so looking forward to a quiet evening," cried Sempaly.

"And I, too, am weary to death of soirees and routs," said Zinka. "They are like so many society parades, in which regiments of fashionables are condemned to pass in review before their weary hostess."

"Let us have a holiday to-night, mother," said Sterzl. "Remember, it is Ash Wednesday, and we are Catholics!"

"I had my doubts; but the Duchess of Otranto said she was going," lisped the baroness.

However, upon Sempaly assuring her with great gravity that the Duchess of Otranto was not looked upon as a leader of fashion in Roman society, she decided to yield to the general wish and stay at home, and retired, saying that she would write some letters before tea.

CHAPTER V.

Most men have their feelings lodged in their heads, while it is well known that women's feelings are in every nerve of their bodies. Count Sempaly, in this respect, had a feminine organization. He had nerves even to the tips of his fingers, and as a gifted Frenchman has expressed it in untranslatable fashion, "*il avait les sens poete!*" Consequently, the most trivial things of the outside world had power to excite in him pleasurable or unpleasurable feelings. The merest detail of an uncongenial nature would be sufficient to spoil his enjoyment of a thing, however sublime and elevated it might be. He could not have recognized the beauties of Faust had he come across that masterpiece in the dog's-eared volume of a circulating library.

But the baroness having retired, there was nothing to mar his enjoyment of Zinka's society. Sterzl had resumed his newspaper, and Zinka, at Sempaly's desire, went back to the piano. As usual, she played her accompaniments without notes, her head slightly bent over the keys, her eyes half closed in dreamy abstraction. The somewhat somber tints of the

room, with its Gobelin hangings, its pretty confusion of ornaments, broad-leaved plants, Japanese lacquer-work, and luxurious furniture of all shapes and sizes, formed a harmonious background to her white-clad rococo figure.

The light of the one lamp in the room diffused a mysterious glow through its rose-lined shade; a kind of melodiously tinted *mezza voce* reigned around. The scent of violets, roses and stocks pervaded the atmosphere, and the tender melancholy of the odor of flowers blended with the tender melancholy of the yearning, pathetic love-songs. Sempaly's whole being thrilled in a pleasurable excitement, unknown to most men.

Zinka sang one after another of the lovely *stornelli*, at his entreaty—her voice becoming ever richer and softer.

"Do not sing too much, Zini, you will tire yourself," admonished Sterzl.

"Only one more," implored Sempaly, "the song I heard you singing before I came up," and she sang:

"'La sepoltura mia sara il tuo seno.'"

The words quivered from her lips; her hands glided off the keys. Then Sempaly seized those soft, warm little hands in his—a delightful dizziness, a boundless joy came over him at the

contact—"Zinka! Are you feeling anything of what you have been singing to-night?"

Her eyes met his. Hers lowered slightly, as one winces from too strong a light, and she shrank back a little as one shrinks back from too great a bliss. The answer still hung upon her lips, when the door opening, the Italian servant announced some unintelligible name, and, accompanied by her daughter and the latter's Polish admirer, entered Baroness Wolnitzska.

"Ah! ah! how glad I am to find you at home, my dears," she cried. "We calculated upon your not going out on Ash Wednesday. How are you, Zinka?"

Zinka was petrified. At the sound of her sister's loud, rough voice, Mamma Sterzl had come in from the adjoining room.

"Why, Charlotte!" she stammered, "Charlotte! You here!"

"Ah! isn't it a surprise, Clotilde? Yes, we often get taken unawares! We arrived at three to-day, and, not finding you at home the first time we called, decided to come round again this evening. It's late, isn't it? For my part, I should have come long before, but Slava persisted that we must dress. Such nonsense, for near relations! But I don't like to contradict her, she so soon turns off cross; so, you see, I just dressed a bit."

Hereupon the baroness, after having given a resounding kiss to her sister and niece, bumped heavily down upon a little easy-chair, all too small for her capacious person.

There is no doubt about her toilet. Upon her cropped gray hair is perched a black lace erection, the ends of which hang down coquettishly on either side. Her portly person is compressed within a violet satin gown which evidently has grown too tight for her, and the shabbiness of which she has endeavored to hide by a lace scarf picturesquely draped about her shoulders.

Her dove-colored gloves are very short and very tight, and are burst out at all the buttonholes.

Slava sports some kind of tri-colored costume and some old-fashioned jewelry which she has picked up at a curiosity shop in Verona. Her hair is dressed *a l'antique*, and she carries her head inclined toward the left shoulder to still further carry out her resemblance to the Apollo. Her features are set in the inane smile of one about to be photographed.

Vladimir Matuschowsky's spare, conspirator's form is clad in a braided coat. He carries a low-crowned, tasseled hat in one hand and looks upon the dress coats of the other men as a personal insult.

"Monsieur Vladimir de Matuschowsky," says Baroness Wolnitzska, introducing him, "a—a—*un ami de la famille.*" When the baroness is in perplexity she always resorts to French.

In Baroness Sterzl, who has now fully recovered from her first feeling of dismay, the desire to make an appearance before her sister again asserts itself.

"Count Sempaly," she exclaims, as she introduces the attache, "a friend of *our* family—my sister, Baroness Wolnitzska. You have doubtless heard of the great leader of the Sclav party, Wolnitzsky, my dear Sempaly, who created such a sensation in the year 1840."

Sempaly returned a silent bow. Baroness Wolnitzska, rising from her chair, stretches out her hand politely to him.

"Delighted to make your acquaintance, my lord. I have already heard of you. My sister, Clotilde, has mentioned you in almost every letter. I am quite *au courant!*"

Once more Sempaly bows silently; then, retiring somewhat into the background, while Slava now joins in conversation with the lady of the house, he murmurs in a low voice to Sterzl:

"I will slip away, my dear fellow. In these family meetings a stranger is always in the

way." His manner has suddenly grown very stiff; his tone unpleasantly haughty.

Sterzl nods.

"All right," he says.

The lady of the house, however, seeing his intention, interposes:

"No, no, my dear Sempaly, you certainly must not run away. You do not disturb us in the slightest degree; and you really must not look upon yourself as a *stranger* among us."

"It would seem as if we had frightened you away, and that I really cannot allow," puts in the Wolnitzska, roguishly.

And Sempaly remains—perhaps solely constrained by that impulse which sometimes seizes us to drain a bitter draught to the very dregs.

"Pull yourself together a little, Zini," whispers Sterzl to his sister, admonishingly. "The interruption is highly disagreeable; but you should not let your vexation be so apparent!"

CHAPTER VI.

TEA has been brought in. Sterzl devotes himself with commendable heroism to his cousin Slava, in order to leave as much freedom as possible to his spoiled sister. Slava replies condescendingly, but glances over her large Japanese fan at Sempaly opposite, who, laconic and ill-tempered, sits beside Zinka on a small couch, assisting her to make tea. Baroness Wolnitzska drinks cup after cup, consumes nearly all the cake, and talks incessantly. Vladimir von Matuschowsky looks down gloomily, consistently rejects all refreshment, and does not speak a word. His arms crossed over his breast, his head thrown back, he sits looking the picture of manly dignity upon the defensive.

"I declare I am quite hungry," confesses Mme. Wolnitzska; "and yet we are staying at a very good hotel—Hotel della Stella, in the Via della Pace; an Austrian baron, whom we met on the journey, recommended it to us. It is not exactly one of the first-rate hotels, but only the upper classes go there. We have a Russian princess dining at *table d'hote* with us, and a French marquise also;

she certainly, I must confess, strikes me as a little odd. I should say she was running away with a lover from her husband, or her creditors."

With due regard to the proprieties, the baroness has uttered this startling supposition behind her open hand, thus shielding the sound of her voice from Zinka and Sempaly.

"They gave us a good dinner, very good indeed," she adds. "We pay six francs a day for our board."

"Seven," interrupts Slava, angrily.

"Six, Slava!"

"Seven, mamma!"

And now ensues an interesting and uncommonly animated discussion between mother and daughter as to whether the charges of Hotel della Stella are six or seven francs a day. Slava remains in possession of the field.

"And with lights and attendance it costs eight," she sums up, triumphantly.

"I let her talk," says the Wolnitzska, again spreading out her hand before her mouth. "She is such an odd girl in that respect. Everything that is cheap she thinks must be common. But what was I saying? Ah, yes, that at *table d'hote* there were flowers on the table. I could have eaten more," and she reached out her hand for another piece of plum cake.

Just then the door opened and Count Siegburg was announced.

"Good-evening, baroness," he said, gayly. "Seeing your windows so cheerfully lighted up as I passed, I could not resist coming up to see how Ash Wednesday was suiting you."

His eyes glanced over the three strangers. In a moment he had taken in the situation, but, far from taking it tragically, he grasped it in its comic aspect. Requesting an introduction to the ladies, he took up position whence he could watch the whole company, Sempaly included, while enjoying the conversational powers of Mme. and Mlle. Wolnitzska.

Turning to the latter, he observed:

"The name of Wolnitzsky is celebrated."

"Yes, my father played an important part in 1848," said Slava.

"Siegburg — Siegburg," murmured Mme. Wolnitzska to her sister—"which Siegburg? The Budower or Waldauer Siegburgs or the Merschenitzer?"

"The Waldauer Siegburgs—mother was a Princess Hag," lisped Baroness Sterzl, leaning back in her corner of the sofa.

"Ah, the Waldauer Siegburgs—they are the best Siegburgs," said the Wolnitzska, astonished.

"Of course!" returned the baroness, with

admirable nonchalance, as though never accustomed to associate with any but "the best Siegburgs."

Mme. Wolnitzska set her broad face into the most amiable leer, and smiled across at the young count, like one waiting her turn to put in a word. For the present, however, she was prevented, and by no less a person than her sister Clotilde, who asked, not altogether amiably, what had possessed her to make this journey to Rome?

"Can you ask?" exclaimed the Wolnitzska. "I had long wanted to see Rome, and after your pressing letters, Clotilde—besides," and now came the story of her Bernini—"you remember our Bernini, Clotilde?"

The baroness nodded.

"I must tell you I had a copy of the Belvedere Apollo; that is, only of the head, by Bernini," she said, turning to Count Siegburg, whose attention, she saw, was beginning to be attracted. "For generations past that work of art had been in our family—"

"For centuries," amended Baroness Sterzl.

"I must confess, I felt it very hard to part with it," continued the Wolnitzska. "Still, I resolved upon the step when Tulpe, the celebrated dealer from Vienna, came to me and bought it."

Sterzl, to whom the wanderings of the Classic God were not unknown, here made some allusion to the fact in his dry way.

Upon which the Wolnitzska, edging ever nearer to Siegburg, continued: "You know, my lord, how it is with girls. For years one may be taking them to balls, dragging them about with one from one seaside place to another, and never a suitor; one stays quietly at home with them, and, all in a trice, comes a lover when least hoped for. I must say it was hard for me to part from that bust!"

"The parting must have been heart-rending," said Siegburg, feelingly.

"Heart-rending!" echoed the Wolnitzska; "doubly heart-rending, because—" (she whispered in a low, confidential voice almost in Siegburg's ear)—"because—my husband always declares that it was through my mania for our Bernini that Slava is so like the Belvedere Apollo. Has not the resemblance struck you?"

"I was struck by it the very moment I entered the room," exclaimed Siegburg without hesitation.

"So everybody says. Dear, dear, you can think what a sacrifice it was. It cuts me to the heart only to think of it. Oh, these feelings! Excuse me if I take off my cap," and

she energetically tore off the black lace erection from her head, and running her hand through her scant, cropped hair, cried: "Good heavens! we poor women have a bad time of it, hemmed in, confined, we may not even go with our heads uncovered!"

"Yes, woman's fate is very sad," acquiesced Siegburg, sympathetically.

"You are a true original," exclaimed Mamma Sterzl, giggling in a somewhat embarrassed manner. It is well known that society has a habit of classing all those unmannerly relatives whom it would gladly see consigned to a lunatic asylum as such. "A true original. Are you meaning now to break a lance in favor of Woman's Rights?"

"Not again, my dear Clotilde, not again," replied the Wolnitzska. "Ever since experience has taught me that every woman is ready to lay down her rights the moment matrimony presents itself to her I have lost interest in emancipation."

"Woman's Rights is well known only to interest the unmarried portion of the sex," threw in Sterzl, who had recently been reading an article on this much-vexed subject.

"And as statistics prove that there are more women than men in the world," said the

Wolnitzska, "I propose a legal polygamy as the best solution of the Woman's Question."

"Maman, vous etes d'une inconvenance!" cried Slava, furiously, with sparkling eyes.

"You have such narrow views," retorted her mother. "Had I mentioned the subject in a frivolous tone, I could have understood your violence; but I look upon it from a philosophic point of view—you will understand me, count?"

"Perfectly, madame," returned Siegburg with dignified gravity. "You consider the subject in the light of national economy, and national economy recognizes no *inconvenance*."

Sempaly pulled his mustache; Zinka changed color; the lady of the house, clapping her sister on the shoulder, gave a shrill forced laugh, as she cried: "Oh, you are an original!"

Sterzl, remarking that Siegburg took great interest in the old woman's foolish chatter, and was about to lay a new trap for her eccentric spirit, now happily remembered that Slava's singing was the only means of reducing her mother to silence, so asked his cousin to sing them one of her national songs. Siegburg having joined his entreaties to Sterzl's, Slava, after protesting that the pitch of the piano was too low, the acoustics of the room bad, etc., etc., finally consented to sing them some patriotic songs, Matuschowsky playing the accompani-

ments. Her tall, Valkyre-like figure trembled with romantic excitement, and, acting up to the traditions of *l'art fremissant*, as she sang she tore to pieces the music she held in her hand, not that it was the particular song she was singing, but that it added to the general artistic effect. Baroness Wolnitzska listened still as a mouse, shedding tears of delight the while. Like so many another mother only conscious of the defects in her daughter which affected herself, she had a profound admiration for her in all else. After Slava had exhausted her repertory to the last verse of the last revolutionary song, forbidden since 1848, and even Sterzl had asked himself which was the greater infliction, his aunt's twaddle or her daughter's singing, Vladimir von Matuschowsky, whose ill-temper, thanks to the faint applause awarded to his and Slava's musical efforts, had reached the culminating point, observed that it was growing late, and the ladies, after the fatigues of their journey, must be needing rest.

Hereupon Mme. Wolnitzska, hastily swallowing the last remaining piece of cake, stroked the crumbs leisurely from her violet satin gown on to the carpet, and, rising, began with many a bow and polite speech to make her way slowly to the door. It took half an hour for her to effect an exit. His relatives having finally

taken their departure and the two friends, who had meanwhile made their farewells to the ladies, being still in the vestibule, Sterzl said good-humoredly to Siegburg:

"I think you were the only one of the party who managed to get some amusement out of it to-night."

Siegburg's face crimsoned; then, looking up frankly to Sterzl, he said:

"Are you vexed with me?"

"Perhaps—a little," returned Sterzl, smiling. "Although I must confess the temptation was great."

"I really am awfully sorry for you, Sterzl," said Siegburg, kindly; and, with the warm-hearted tact that always won him friends, went on to say: "There's nothing so disagreeable in the whole world as a sudden incursion of ineligible relations. I know that from dire experience. In Vienna last spring my mother had a perfect shower of old aunts coming direct upon her from the Bukowina."

Sempaly meanwhile, busying himself getting into his otter-lined fur coat, maintained a sulky silence.

CHAPTER VII.

It is three days since Count Truyn had so categorically challenged his cousin to come to a decision, and since the sudden appearance of grotesque Baroness Wolnitzska had frightened the sweet specter from his soul, checking the declaration of love hovering upon his very lips; and Sempaly had still not taken any steps to be transferred. Everywhere in the course of those three days had Truyn's eyes followed him, ever fixed upon him with earnest questioning, as though to say: "Have you made your decision?" No, he had made no decision. To a man constituted like Sempaly nothing is so difficult. In a case like his, Fate may decide a matter, he never!

The apparition of the ridiculous Baroness Wolnitzska might indeed avail to press back the declaration hovering upon his lips, but forever to chase Zinka's image from his heart it could not! The foolish old woman's foolish sayings he had forgotten; the stornello Zinka had sung to him that evening was ever ringing in his ears. For two days, by the exercise of great self-restraint, he had avoided the palazetto;

but yesterday he had chanced to see her only for one moment in the Corso. She was sitting by Marie Vulpini. She wore a gray velvet dress with a large, broad-brimmed hat throwing a soft shadow over her forehead and upon her golden hair. She had a large bouquet on her lap, and was chatting pleasantly with Gabrielle Truyn and the little Vulpinis. What an affectionate, merry way she had with children! The blood rushed madly to his veins as her eyes met his and she returned his salutation, blushing slightly as she did so.

It was the first time she had blushed on meeting him.

That night he dreamed the most impossible things. And now this morning he was walking in the sun-scorched solitude of the deserted Pincio, angrily breaking off little twigs from the bushes and brooding. More and more did the possession of Zinka present itself as the *sine qua non* of existence. He had never yet refused himself what he had coveted, and now—

A bright March sun was shining down upon the Piazza di Spagna, the waters of the Barcaccia were glistening in a bluish sheen, the church towers of the Trinita dei Monti stood out sharply defined against the blue sky. Models in conventional Italian costume, blind

beggars, muttering half aloud the incessant prayer, are thronging the shallow steps of the Piazza.

In front of the Hotel de l'Europe cab-drivers sleep comfortably under their enormous, much-mended umbrellas, which, like market women, they have fastened to their driving seats, using them alike as protection against sun and rain. Flower-sellers crouch in every doorway, some with a white fox-terrier sitting by their side, his nose in the air. The square swarms with tourists, the eyes of the Beatrice Cenci—the saddest eyes in the world—look down from the window of a photograph shop upon the commonplace, every-day life going on beneath.

Unconcerned and unsuspectingly Count Siegburg turns out of Law's Money Exchange Office, breathing in with content the hyacinth-scented air as he glances approvingly after the well-made figure of a young English girl just then passing in tight-fitting jersey. Absorbed in his observation, he starts on hearing himself addressed by a rough voice:

"Good-morning, my lord, *quelle chance!*" Turning, he recognizes in the broad, crimson face before him, shaded by an enormous bell-shaped hat, the Baroness Wolnitzska.

Despite the sunshine, she was wearing that most unbecoming of all ladies' apparel, which,

originally intended as a protection from rain, has later degenerated into a covering for many a shabby toilet, and has hence come to be known in Paris as a *cache-misere;* and, moreover, despite the dryness of the pavement, she was holding up the said *cache-misere* and the dress it concealed with both hands, thereby bringing her enormous feet, cased in worn elastic boots, very much in evidence.

"Ah, baroness!" raising his hat, "I really did not—"

"Yes. You did not recognize me," responded the baroness, imperturbably, "so I spake first. *Quelle chance.* You belong to the embassy, too?"

"Really—"

"That's just what I wanted. I am going to ask a favor of you, count. My daughter is anxious to obtain an audience with His Holiness. You must know Slava is a rigid Catholic. Between ourselves, I look upon it merely as a matter of fashion. My opinions are philosophical in religious matters. Still it would interest me to see the Pope—"

"The Pope, unfortunately, is much less accessible now than formerly," said Siegburg. "Not belonging to the Papal Embassy myself, I regret that I shall be unable to assist you in the matter."

"Just what my nephew says. It is unlucky, terribly unlucky!"

At that moment Slava appeared from Piale's library, wearing a shabby-looking Directoire costume, with broad-brimmed hat and feathers, and a pair of not too clean gloves, reaching above the elbows.

"Ah, *bon jour*," she cried, affably offering her finger-tips to the young count. Matuschowsky, who accompanied her, surlily lifted his hat. Surrounded, as he now is, on all sides, Siegburg begins to find the situation somewhat unpleasant.

"It is always such a pleasure to meet one's countrymen in a foreign land," says Slava.

"Uncommonly," answers Siegburg, and thinks to himself—

"Forth from this shady vale . . ."

Then suddenly his merry eyes light up with their customary spirit of mischief, as he hears the Wolnitzska exclaim once more: "Good-morning, my lord, *quelle chance!*" and sees her bear down upon none other than Sempaly, who just then, dejectedly and by the world forgot, was descending the sun-scorched steps of the Piazzi di Spagna into the square.

"Excuse me," he muttered, as he too started, "I really did not recognize you." His eyes

sought the distance, as is the case with people who suddenly find themselves in an embarrassing situation.

Unabashed, the Wolnitzska continued, volubly: "I cannot tell you how delighted I am to have met you, count. I want to ask a favor of you. Can you not manage to procure us admission to the Farnesina? They say that the Duca di Ripalda is very difficult—"

"I am sorry it is quite impossible for me."

Here a group of strangers riveted Sempaly's attention—two young ladies, accompanied by their maid. Both ladies, tall and slender as two young fir trees and strikingly lovely, clad in English tailor-made costumes, were in eager debate with an Italian vender of embroideries, appearing to take the greatest pleasure in making their purchases in the open street.

"Two charming-looking girls. I seem to know their faces," said Mme. Wolnitzska. "Are they not the Jatinskys?"

Now the two pretty girls look up. "Nicki, Nicki," they cry merrily, half across the square, with the unconcern of people brought up in the belief that the world is made for them alone.

"Pray excuse me, madame," murmurs Sempaly. "My cousins—" Hereupon he leaves her, to hurry across to the two young ladies.

"When did you arrive? Where are you staying?"

"This morning—Hotel de Londres. Mamma has just written you a note to the embassy. Ah, another Austrian!" as Siegburg comes up. "Rome is a refuge for Vienna folk. Do tell me, who was that old fortune-teller and her enterprising daughter who seized upon you two so eagerly?"

Meanwhile the Wolnitzskas—mamma beaming, Slava haughty as the Belvedere Apollo incorporate—pass them by in the Via Condotti. Suddenly the Wolnitzska comes to a dead stop.

"I quite forgot to beg Count Sempaly to procure me tickets for the opening of the International Art Exhibition!" she cries, striking her brow, and turns back with the expressed intention of making good her omission, and only the determined opposition of Vladimir von Matuschowsky avails to preserve Sempaly from a renewed onslaught.

CHAPTER VIII.

It is on the Pincio, between five and six, that the band plays daily, and the great world of Rome assembles to see the sun go down behind St. Peter's.

The reflection of the rosy sunset rests golden upon the sandy soil, shines brilliantly upon the brass instruments of the musicians and their military accoutrements, lending a metallic sheen to the waters of the great fountain behind the band stand. Long, black shadows stretch across the grass; marvelously bright are the hues of the palms, yucca trees and evergreen oaks, as they stand out against the sky, whose rosy glow is now beginning to fade into the paler tints of evening.

The green glades of the Pincio are deserted by the fashionable world; four species of humanity alone are to be encountered there—governesses, nurses, children and priests. All varieties of priests are there represented, from distinguished Mon Signori with their delicately cut features, military bearing and white hands; monks, with their bearded faces and bald heads showing from under their brown hoods; two

whole battalions of seminarists, clad in every possible hue, thin and overgrown, with immature, unhealthy-looking complexions.

Only separated from these by a leafy screen is the world of fashion. The Roman aristocracy in their brilliant equipages, and the foreigners in more or less elegant carriages from livery stables, among which an occasional one or two-horsed cab from the ranks, has managed to slip in. Denser and denser are the lines of carriages, ever wider rolls the stream of Roman fashion out from the gardens of the Borghese, along the Piazza del Popolo to the Pincian Hill.

Upon the plateau the carriages draw up. Gentlemen crowd round with pretty speeches; ladies, in their carriages, call merrily one to another the society talk, unintelligible to all but the initiated.

From the hanging gardens leading from the Pincio to the Via Margutta arise the sweet scents of blossoming spring. Rome lies far below. Crowning its confused mass of houses and ruins, rigid, solemn, stupendous, lighted up by the distant rays of the setting sun, stands out St. Peter's upon the very verge of the horizon.

Countess Ilsenbergh's spacious landau is drawn up beside that of the Princess Vulpini. The Jatinskys have divided their favors.

On Countess Ilsenbergh's left reclines the Countess Jatinsky, smiling and indolent. Princess Vulpini chaperons the two young countesses. Upon the back seat, beside his cousin Eugenie—known as Nini in the family circle—is Sempaly. Siegburg, leaning on the carriage door, is talking his merry nonsense. Every anecdote of Roman society, fit for young ladies' ears, he retails. They reply with gay musical laughter, finally infecting Sempaly with their childish gayety, who, laconic and absent, had taken the seat beside Nini, a position which makes him the envy of all the men to-day.

Suddenly there is a general stir. Every one looks in one direction.

"What is the matter?" asks Polyxena Jatinsky, leaning slightly forward.

"It must be Doria's new drag; or the King," answers Princess Vulpini, blinking out of her short-sighted eyes.

"No," replies Siegburg. "Neither one nor the other. It is the Baroness Wolnitzska!"

In Frau Sterzl's well-appointed landau, placed by her at their disposal for the afternoon, are seated the two Wolnitzskas—mother and daughter. They are wearing their most fetching costumes. The daughter reclines elegantly, the mother stands up the greater part of the

time, scrutinizing the Roman world of fashion through an opera-glass. Only from time to time, either to repose herself, or because unable longer to maintain her equilibrium, does she sit down, when she occupies herself with a close examination of every detail of her borrowed splendor. Not a tassel escapes her, as she pats and presses the luxurious cushions. Her extraordinary behavior, combined with the *bizarre* appearance of mother and daughter, is the principal reason of the sensation caused by the Sterzl's landau on the Pincio, and which they naturally consider to be solely caused by Slava's striking resemblance to the Belvedere Apollo.

"The Wolnitzska! that stupid old woman we saw you with yesterday on the Piazza di Spagna!" exclaims Polyxena.

"Yes."

"Only fancy, Nicki," to Sempaly, "mamma actually knows her."

"Who are you talking of, children?" asks Countess Jatinsky from the Ilsenbergh carriage.

"Of the Wolnitzska, mamma; do you see her?"

"Heaven preserve me!" cried Countess Jatinsky, fervently. "One's life is not safe

with the woman. She laid siege to me at Villa Wolkonsky this morning."

"How ever do you come to know the old person, aunt?" asked Sempaly, impatiently.

"Your uncle had some political relations at one time with her husband," replied the countess. "She is insufferable. For a full half-hour did she tack herself on to me."

"Her communications must have been highly interesting, countess," said Siegburg.

"They were anything but interesting to me," returned the countess, in some annoyance. "I was informed how much her journey had cost, how much her daily expenditure for hired carriages amounts to, and that in her youth she had had singing lessons from Cicimara. But the principal theme of her discourse was her sister Sterzl, who seems to be living in style here, and only associates with the *creme de la creme.* You are laughing?"

"You most allow, mamma, that the name Sterzl is irresistibly funny in connection with the *creme de la creme!*" exclaimed Polyxena.

"I saw nothing funny in it!" replied Countess Jatinsky, pathetically. "By the way, one thing really interesting she told me, that her niece, Zenaide Sterzl — now, why are you laughing again?"

"Zenaide Sterzl! The name is a poem!" cried Countess Polyxena.

"Well, it appears from what that old person said that this fair Zenaide is about to exchange the unlovely name of Sterzl for one of the best names in Austria—so, at least, she told me. It is not to be made public yet, so she was not at liberty to divulge the bridegroom's name; but Zenaide was as good as engaged to some young count—one of the attaches to the Austrian embassy. Who can it be? You gentlemen ought to know."

"Oh, Count Siegburg, are you the happy man?" asked Polyxena, turning to him.

Siegburg shook his head, and stroking his fair mustache, with a malicious smile, glanced at Sempaly, who was in a state of unmistakable annoyance.

"Or can it be you, Nicki?" continued Polyxena, mischievously. "Allow me to congratulate you on your desirable relatives." So perceptible an embarrassment now suddenly seized upon the little circle that she stopped abruptly.

"I know nothing about it," said Sempaly, gloomily. "The powers of imagination of that gossiping old woman are simply stupendous!"

The sunlight upon the uniforms and brass

instruments of the band grow redder and fainter; the white glow upon the green leaves fades away.

"Gran Dio! Morir si Giovane," the band is playing.

The sun has sunk; lights and shadows alike have vanished; the day is over; night not yet come on. There is a dull glow behind St. Peter's as of an almost extinguished fire.

"We shall meet this evening at the Ellis's," say the ladies to Siegburg, as, bowing, he retires.

The carriages roll down the Pincian Hill, past Villa Medici—down, down to the heart of Rome. Through the evening air resounds a great, irregular roar, like that of a river rushing to the sea.

CHAPTER IX.

Mr. and Lady Julia Ellis—she bore her title by right as daughter of an English earl—enormously rich and highly connected, had for many years passed their winters in Italy, Lady

Julia being unable to stand the severity of an English winter. In former years she had been renowned for her eccentricities; now she was a quiet, elderly woman, with white hair, faultlessly regular features and very stout arms. Like all English women, she loved to appear in low-necked dresses on every possible occasion, and had a special fancy for wearing pink-tipped feathers in her hair.

Her spouse, Mr. Ellis, was younger than she, with a handsome, thoroughly English face, short whiskers, and a head of picturesquely waving white hair. His profile bore a resemblance to that of Felix Mendelssohn, of which he was immensely proud. He was proud of two other things: of his wife, who had been admired by George IV.; and of an old umbrella, borrowed from him on one occasion by Felix Mendelssohn.

He played the concertina, and gave musical soirées every week. On the evening that the Jatinskys were to make their first appearance at Lady Julia's, Tulpin, the Russian genius, who had composed the musical accompaniment to the Ilsenbergh Tableaux, was to give a sketch of his new opera, composed on a national Russian air to a French libretto. Of course he belonged to those Russians who combine the wildest love of everything Slavonic with the

pious wish of being taken, wherever they may chance to be, for born Parisians.

The grand piano groaned beneath his hands. Various good old friends from "Orpheus" and "The Wedding by Torchlight," floated on a sea of sonorous tremolos. Every now and then Tulpin would shout in explanatory fashion to the audience. "The Czar speaks"; "the Bojar speaks"; "the peasant speaks"; or, "the rushing of the wind in the Caucasus," "the foaming of the Terck."

Mr. Ellis, who was a firm believer in the opera, threw in a "Magnificent—magnificent!" from time to time. "You must positively work out the opera—it must not be left unfinished!"

"Work it out!" sighed Tulpin ironically. "Work is not my province. *We* have ideas. We leave the working out to—hem—hem—to others. Would you believe it? I cannot read a note of music—not a single note," he repeated with an air of undescribable self-satisfaction. Hereupon he struck a couple of clumsy arpeggios, to which Mr. Ellis cried another "astonishing," and likened him to Mendelssohn, to Tulpin's disgust, who prided himself upon being one of the School of the Future. A prize student from Villa Medici who had been waiting a whole hour to perform his "Arabian Symphony," here murmured :

"For Heaven's sake! if we cannot be the pampered of the earth, at least leave us music for our consolation."

At length, Lady Julia, rising compassionately, invited her guests to the tea-room. Her invitation was unanimously welcomed, and the music-room was soon deserted. Only Frau Tulpin from affection, the prize student from indignation, and Mr. Ellis from a sense of duty were left standing by the grand piano. In the adjoining rooms the guests refreshed themselves with tea and chit-chat; yet, even there their spirits did not rise. A feeling of depression had broken out among them like an epidemic, and the prevailing topic of conversation was the pleasantest mode of committing suicide.

Tulpin banged on uninterruptedly. Suddenly, even his energy relaxed, and he came to a dead stop. The Jatinskys had arrived. There was a general commotion. They were so interesting that even Tulpin left the piano to swell their court.

They were all three smiling and amiable. One might even say they brought a cheering atmosphere with them. Countess Ilsenbergh who accompanied them, had fully initiated them into the "ins and outs" of Roman society; they felt their superiority, but concealed

it beneath the most charming suavity. The two young countesses were surrounded, besieged, and, strange to say, their ovation was almost greater from the women than even from the men. Everything about them was the subject of admiration—their small feet, their characteristic yet delicate and sharply defined profiles, their slender waists, the color of their hair, the artistic simplicity of their toilets. There were wagers as to whether their dresses came from Fanet or Worth.

Suddenly a stir in the adjoining room announced the entry of some favorite of society. Zinka, without her mother, but accompanied by Cecil, coming up to the hostess, held out her hand to her with affectionate greeting.

"You are incorrigible. You always come too late," said Lady Julia, with affectionate reproach.

"Like repentance and the police," returned Zinka gayly, while Lady Julia presented her to the Countess Jatinsky.

"But now, come and help me pour out tea; you know, dear child, I always count upon your assistance," continued Lady Julia, "and first, pass these cups to your charming young countrywomen."

Polyxena and Nini were sitting some five paces off, surrounded by the elite of the Roman

scions of aristocracy. Zinka, approaching them with her winning grace, came full upon Count Sempaly, who could do no less than speak and shake hands. And as every one else in his position would have done, he just lighted upon the most unsuitable thing to say possible: "What an age it is since we have met!"

With head lightly thrown back, and looking at him through her half-closed eyes with bewitching disdain: "You have been continuing your Ash-Wednesday penance, I suppose?" she said.

"Perhaps!" he answered, with involuntary smile.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I was inclined to break off acquaintance with you," she said, "but since"— glancing at the two young countesses—"I know the reason of your faithlessness, I, at any rate, can understand it. Perhaps you will have the kindness to introduce me to those ladies."

"Fraulein Sterzl." As he pronounced the name, a suppressed smile curled the corners of Polyxena's mouth. Zinka saw the smile, and saw, too, the sudden change in Sempaly's bearing, how affected and insufferably haughty it had become. Deadly pale, with flashing eyes, she hastily returned the bows of the Austrian girls and turned away. Sterzl,

watching the little scene from a doorway, as he talked to Truyn, knitted his brows.

Meanwhile Sempaly, drawing up a stool close to his cousins, had seated himself deliberately with his back to the tea-table at which Zinka was officiating.

"So that is the renowned Zenaide Sterzl?" began Polyxena, mockingly. "You can't be said to have bad taste, Nicki. But what a tone of intimacy she takes with you. It is rather cool, to say the least of it!"

He made no reply.

"She seems to treat you as if you were her own property!"

"Oh, Zena," said Nini, anxious to check her sister's love of satire. "Do not speak so loud."

Here Mr. Ellis appearing, informed the ladies that Monsieur B., the prize student, would kindly favor the company with his "Arabian Symphony."

There was a fresh exit to the music room. After the symphony, a young Belgian count, who devoted all his spare time to the composition of funeral marches, and was, moreover, renowned for his rendering of canzonettas and chansonettes, such as are to be heard in the streets of Florence, or the *Café Chantants* of Paris, seated himself at the piano and gave a

love duet between a cock and hen with such feeling that the whole company applauded to the echo amid shouts of laughter — the Jatinskys especially, to whom the kind of entertainment was quite new.

Mrs. Ferguson sang some Paris couplets, and Mr. Ellis played an adagio of Beethoven's upon the concertina ; then Zinka was asked to sing.

"What shall I sing ? You know my extensive *repertoire*," she said, turning with forced gayety to Mr. Ellis.

"We beg for a *stornello*," exclaimed Siegburg, going up to the piano. "Vieni Maggio, vieni primavera." Lady Julia seconded his petition. Zinka played a few notes of the accompaniment, and her voice, sweet, but somewhat veiled, wafted like the note of a bird through the room. She had never yet sung the first words of that song but that *he* had come, from the furthest corner of the room, to her side. Involuntarily raising her eyes, her look sought him. There he sat leaning back comfortably in the corner of a sofa, by Polyxena ; holding his foot on his knee in free and easy manner, he was smiling at some whispered communication from her. Zinka lost her presence of mind. A bewildering timidity came over her ; she could not sing that song in his presence. Her voice

broke; she forgot the accompaniment; nervously attempted to strike a few chords, and suddenly rose shame-faced from the piano.

"I cannot sing to-night," she stammered. Polyxena made some malicious remark which irritated Sempaly. He was on the point of leaving her to go to Zinka and console her for her break-down; but ere he could make up his mind, Nini had risen. Despite her timidity she went straight across the room to Zinka, and said a few kind, sympathetic words.

Sempaly remained where he was. But a little later, as he wrapped Nini in her opera cloak, he murmured, "You are a real good sort, Nini," and kissed her hand.

CHAPTER X.

SEMPALY'S attentions to her had made Zinka the fashion; his abrupt withdrawal not only of his attentions, but of almost all intercourse with her, naturally exposed her to ridicule on all sides. People began to tell of the capital caricature of Sterzl and his sister Sempaly had sketched that evening at the Vulpini's.

Countess Gaudry, formerly one of Sempaly's flames, but since deserted on Zinka's account, showed it to her friends with most malicious innuendos. People made merry over the little adventuress who had come to Rome to win a princely coronet, and had had to put up with such sharp humiliation.

Of course the leaders of Roman society competed with those of the international circle to do honor to the Jatinskys. Countess Gaudry opened the cycle of ovation with a soiree, at which Ristori was to recite. Sterzl was naturally among those invited. His mother and sister were not included. It was the first occasion since Zinka's appearance at the Ilsenbergh's that she had been passed over in any exclusive society. Many international fashionable ladies followed the Gaudry's example, desirous to show themselves to the full as exclusive as the Austrians, and not sorry also to revenge themselves for many a thoughtless, inconsiderate word uttered by Zinka, when she ranked among the favorites of society.

The true Roman nobility troubled itself not in the slightest with all this pettiness, treating Zinka with the same superficial politeness as before. Upon her their politeness made as little impression as did the pin thrusts on other sides. Had her feelings not been so deeply

concerned in Sempaly's defection, she would assuredly have felt most bitterly all the social humiliations to which she was so persistently subjected. But her one great grief made her impervious to all lesser ones. There is a sorrow which ridicule cannot touch! All the same, invited or not, she could no longer prevail upon herself to go into society. The very thought of meeting Sempaly again in a drawing-room with his cousins filled her with mortal agony. She had become another being. A timid smile now perpetually haunted her lips like the ghost of a dead happiness, her movements had lost all their elasticity. Her gait reminded one of an angel dragging its wings.

The Baroness Sterzl, of course, drove as before in the Corso, busying herself with extraordinary perseverance to bow to all her society friends. She also went out alone to entertainments as often as she reasonably could. To be ill friends with Countess Gaudry, and yet on visiting terms with all the Roman duchesses, afforded her a sense of proud satisfaction.

The only thing that really annoyed her at that time was the cross-questioning adopted by her indiscreet sister, Wolnitzska, concerning the state of things between Zinka and Sempaly.

She had herself from pure love of boasting, the very day after her sister's arrival, given

her to understand that Zinka was as good as engaged, but that it was not to be made public yet. Her aunt's want of tact had well-nigh driven Zinka to madness, when happily, and perhaps with kind intention, Siegburg contrived one day, when he happened to meet mother and daughter at the Palazetto, so to terrify them with accounts of Roman fever that, filled with unreasoning panic, they took train the very next morning for Naples.

The one who felt most acutely the abrupt change in the tone of society toward his family was, strange to say, Sterzl. Heretofore he had ever been too large-minded to trouble his head about petty notions of caste, and had, moreover, a too wise and manly sense of self-respect ever to exhibit that morbid sensitiveness toward those of higher rank which often renders it difficult to even the most considerate of aristocrats to avoid hurting the susceptibilities of an inferior.

Democratic spleen is a malady undergone by every commoner—from Werther downward—who happens to be brought in contact with aristocratic circles. Sterzl, however, had now lived so long in the atmosphere that he should have become acclimatized to it. But no. He had caught the malady overnight, and like all child-

ish diseases taken by adults, he took it severely. All the agony now endured by his worshiped sister he placed to the charge, not of his own imprudence and Sempaly's weakness of character, but solely and alone to the tyranny of social prejudice. Thenceforth he conceived the most violent contempt for all phases of society, and became insufferable toward it. Perfectly well-bred, and accustomed from early childhood to the forms of good society, he never could divest himself from the manners of a gentleman; but as far as he could he did. He laid down the law; he was irritable; utterly wanting in courtesy; and, as a consequence, was always in hot water.

Even at home he was not what he used to be. His pride suffered intolerably that Zinka should so ill understand how to conceal her grief; while he was humiliated at being so powerless to lessen her pain. At first, trying to divert her mind, he would bring her concert and opera tickets; or the most charming trinkets, or pieces of rare old china, carved ivory, or a thousand things that she used to love. Formerly they would have excited her to rapture; now she merely smiled with the grateful thanks of an invalid for whom some delicate dish is provided that he is unable any more to enjoy. They could see how hard she tried to take

pleasure in it all; the tears standing in her eyes the while.

This excited Sterzl to frenzy. At first he had sternly avoided paining her by any mention of Sempaly. But as days and weeks went by without bringing the least change in her dejected condition, he grew impatient. The whim seized him to open Zinka's eyes about the manner of man that he was. With his straightforward, determined character, he had ever made short work of his own disappointments, however sharp hit he might have been. He had always been accustomed to "let a thing slide that would not pull straight," and then at once to turn to fresh interests.

A clear insight into things had ever been the main thing with him. Truth was his religion. He could not understand that to a nature such as Zinka's her illusions were a necessity; could not understand that Zinka was striving to trace the change in Sempaly to the force of circumstances; to her own unworthiness; to everything, in short, but to himself; that she was feeling the absolute need of being still able to love him, even were he forever lost to her. Cecil's rigid nature could not understand the fluctuating character of Zinka's tender, ever-changing temperament.

She would never answer the depreciating,

contemptuous words with which her brother always now coupled Semplay's name, but would listen silently, looking at him with her shy, frightened eyes and white cheeks, like some dying martyr whom her persecutors are trying to convince that there is no God.

The brilliant result attained by Cecil in his well-meant clumsy efforts was, for the time, a complete estrangement between himself and his sister; an estrangement which, though only outward with him, with her went far deeper.

This naturally caused Sterzl's hatred toward Sempaly to increase in vehemence. Brought daily in contact with each other, there arose continual subjects of disagreement between them.

Sterzl would make the most biting comments upon any little omission of Sempaly's in the course of his official duties, and would sneer in the most cutting manner concerning the short-comings of a young relative of the count's, lately attached to the Embassy. "There is no room for doubt," he concluded one of his attacks, "but that we Austrians think it of far higher importance that an attache should be of good family than that he should know how to spell."

To such coarse, tactless speeches did he allow his irritation to lead him now!

Without ever losing his temper at any such observation, Sempaly would smilingly look straight before him and make answer in lazy singing voice: "Right you are! Astonishing the prejudices that still exist in the world. Hm! We really ought to take example by the French *Corps diplomatique*. Don't you think so?"

Some days before, there had been a sarcastic article in the *Figaro* upon the latest blunder of one of its plebeian representatives at some foreign court.

True, Sempaly might have answered him in more arrogant fashion, but the more subtle his irony, the more certain it was to increase Sterzl's irritation.

CHAPTER XI.

Countess Jatinsky passed nearly the whole time of her visit to Rome upon her couch. If asked how she liked Rome, she would reply that she found it terribly fatiguing. Were her daughters asked the same question, they declared it to be enchanting. Sempaly knew per-

fectly well that what they liked best in Rome was their unworthy cousin. He certainly displayed all his accustomed amiability for their benefit, praised or blamed this or that in their toilets, made becoming alterations with his own hands in the style of dressing their hair, kept them conscientiously informed as to their conquests, and gave them cigarettes and trinkets from Castelani's.

When nothing else offered itself, he would take them, always under the chaperonage of some matron, to visit a picture-gallery, or one of the churches. Polyxena had a way of hurrying past the greatest work of art with nose in the air, then suddenly stopping short to laugh and call attention to a comical observation of some tourist she had overheard, or to some extraordinary costume she had spied out. Nini, with more respect for art, looked at each work conscientiously according to the catalogue, and even kept a diary. Polyxena was usually considered the handsomer and cleverer of the two sisters. Sempaly paid her the most attention, although he decidedly gave Nini the preference. The time he did not devote to his cousins he spent almost exclusively at the club, where he lost large sums of money. He was looking ill, and complained of attacks of Roman fever.

What did the world say to his conduct? Phlegmatic Italian society concerned itself nowise therewith; Mesdames Ferguson and De Gaudry laughed about it; Siegburg stigmatized it as scandalous; and Ilsenbergh, as, at least, greatly wanting in tact. The general opinion was that he ought to have had himself transferred. Princess Vulpini had long, sorrowful conferences with the general upon it, reproaching herself bitterly for not having sooner grasped the situation; not having even given sufficient attention to Sempaly's marked attention to Zinka, thinking more of Siegburg's evident admiration in that quarter, and only taking a motherly interest in the "good match" for her favorite.

Truyn was simply furious at Sempaly's heartless conduct. What he was at that time to Zinka can only be conceived by any one who, suffering from a bitter, and, at the same time, humiliating sorrow, has known what it is to have the support of a delicate-minded, noble-hearted friend ever at hand. He was the only one, in that dark hour, who never caused her an instant's pain. He had the light hand and infinite tenderness which even the best of men only attain to after having themselves undergone much sorrow.

Every afternoon he would come with his

little daughter to fetch Zinka for a walk, knowing how painful the drive in the Corso must be to her now. And while the baroness, reclining luxuriously in her carriage, joined the world of fashion in the daily drive to Villa Borghese and the Pincio, the three—sometimes the general would make a fourth—would be walking in the dreamy cloister gardens, or driving far out to the Campagna.

Never once did Truyn cause her to shed a secret tear; and many a painful blush, called up to her wan cheeks by some thoughtless remark of the others, did he help her to conceal.

On a sultry afternoon in spring, Truyn was sauntering along with the general and his two daughters—as he playfully called Zinka and Gabrielle — after a long expedition through the dark picturesque streets which surround the Pantheon.

The neighborhood was poor and squalid. Over a high garden wall hung a mulberry tree just breaking into leaf; in its branches a blackbird was singing; a few bright red geraniums behind the rusty bars of a little window near broke the dull brown monotony; over the tall roofs was an arch of deep blue sky. The air was sultry and oppressive in

the extreme, and permeated with a smell of drains and decayed vegetables. From out one of the windows came a woman's voice, singing a melancholy, passionate love song. All at once, blackbird and singer were silenced; a dull howling and groaning filled the lonely street; the air was darkened with a thick, black smoke.

Zinka, whose nerves had been sadly unstrung of late, started violently. "It is nothing—only a funeral," said Truyn, as he took off his hat.

It was already passing them. A Roman funeral, in all its picturesque and horror-inspiring details. A long procession of mysterious disguised figures, their eyes peering through two slits in the coarse sacking which covers their heads, a rope round their waists, carrying either torches, or dread banners bearing the insignia of Death upon them—then a number of bare-footed monks; finally, the coffin covered with a funeral pall of bright yellow, and borne by more men disguised like the first, bending beneath the weight of their burden. With the red glimmer and black smoke of the torches, the groaning voices of the singers, the flashing eyes peering out from the masked faces, ghostlike, and emitting a combined odor of mildew and incense, as of

some re-opened grave of the Middle Ages, the procession passed on through the narrow street.

Half fainting, Zinka leaned on Truyn's arm. Gabrielle, who, childlike, had been far less impressed, followed it with curious eyes, and soon had entered into conversation with a woman in the crowd in her fluent ungrammatical Italian.

"Who is it that is being buried?" she asked, after several other questions.

"*Una donna,*" was the answer.

"Young?" continued the child.

"*Si.*"

"What did she die of? fever?"

"No," said the Roman woman with a shrug of her shoulders; then added in the melodious drawling tone peculiar to the people of Rome, "*di passione!*"

The procession had passed on, the groaning had died away — the blackbird resumed its song.

They continued their way, weary Zinka leaning on Truyn's arm, the general and the merry child behind.

"*Passione?* Is that a Roman illness?" she asked the old general with her irrepressible thirst for knowledge.

"No. It is pretty general everywhere," returned the old man dryly.

"But only among the people, I suppose?" said Gabrielle.

"No. It is to be met with in higher circles too, only then it is called by another name," he replied with involuntary bitterness, more to himself than to Gabrielle.

"Is it a disgrace then to die of it?" she asked with wide open astonished eyes.

Suddenly the general perceived that Zinka was listening to them; at the child's foolish question she had sunk her head.

Such a thing would have deprived him of all self-possession; he would have been powerless to say a word to the poor humiliated girl. Not so Truyn. Stooping down to her, he whispered a few words in her ear; the general could not distinguish what he said, but evidently it was something kind and encouraging. Something which, without making reference to the past, proved to her how highly he prized and esteemed her, for she answered him quietly and naturally; and he went on to talk of his early days, of pleasant characteristic traits of his parents, and similar things grateful to a wounded spirit. And as they parted at the door of the Palazetto, she could even smile at him.

"He may not be a genius, but he certainly has a good heart!" said the general to himself.

Once or twice Truyn rode with her in the Campagna. This she enjoyed at first; but one day they came upon Sempaly, galloping in high spirits with his two lovely cousins over the anemone-sown turf. From that time she made excuses and avoided the Campagna. As though she must not expect to be constantly meeting him and them! Why did she stay on in Rome? Sterzl would not hear of her departure; in his eyes it would have been looked upon as retreat after a lost battle by satirical Roman society. For a totally different reason did the baroness also oppose any curtailing of their stay in Rome. She had rented the Palazetto until the fifteenth of May!

And did Zinka seriously want to leave the place where she had known such sorrow? She often said that she was yearning for home; but every time their departure was mentioned she shrank back in alarm. She dreaded to meet *him*, yet longed to do so; and of an evening, sitting in the drawing-room of the Palazetto, Truyn would notice how, every time the gate-bell sounded, Zinka would give a start and look expectantly toward the portière.

In her poor heart there still lurked a glimmer of hope, weary, heart-broken hope, which was nothing more than pain and unrest.

BOOK THIRD.

EASTER.

CHAPTER I.

It is Holy Week in Rome, and an Italian spring is in all its wealth of sunny glory! Even in the mystical half light of St. Peter's glides the spring-tide sheen, now flickering for a moment on the holy water, now falling across the figures of gigantic angels, now upon the intricate sculpture of grand statuary, now upon the delicate tesselated pavement — all with the cold glitter of light reflected on the hard surface of marble.

The hours go by one by one; the long devout hours of Wednesday in Holy Week. Then the last glimmer of daylight fades away, a mysterious twilight pervades the Cathedral of St. Peter's; a transparent veil, as of crape, floats over all its glories. The hard stone walls no longer visible, the whole vast temple seems as if built of shadows; growing ever more and more mys-

tic, as though descending from heaven to earth, it seems impregnated with a holy mystery. Zinka kneels in the Papal Chapel, between Gabrielle and Count Truyn, her eyes bent on the ground, her hands convulsively clasped, praying with all the fanaticism of a youthful spirit whose hopes, wrecked on earth, seek an abiding place in heaven. To right and left of them sit the reverend prelates in their carved stalls, clad in all the ornate magnificence of their vestments. To their very feet press the indiscreet throng of strangers, irreverent, curious.

In modulations of stern recitative resounds the tragedy of the Passion through the sacred edifice.

The last of the twelve candles on the altar has been extinguished. "Miserere mei" peals through the building now with terrific grandeur, anon shudderingly, marvelously sweet it dies away in tremulous tones, until, rising to the most awful cry of anguish, it echoes through the profound stillness as the agonized cry of the God of Love over the pain and sorrow from which even He could not free the children of men! Before the majesty of that divine self-sacrificing sorrow the individual sorrow of poor humanity must bend the knee.

Zinka bows her head.

The service is over. The last tones of the

organ have died sobbing away. The crowd joins in the procession which, with a cardinal at its head, proceeds through the sacred edifice. Truyn and the two girls, leaving the chapel, draw near to the entrance door. Behind them the procession, drowned by the sounds of their own footsteps, sounds like the rush of angels' wings. In the midst of this solemn peace Zinka's heart is quieted. For the first time for weeks she has forgotten.

"Most interesting. But the bass was dreadfully hoarse."

It is Polyxena Jatinsky, who, now a hair's breadth from Zinka, is giving expression to this somewhat summary criticism upon the impressive service. Zinka looks up; Sempaly, with his aunt and his two cousins, is standing close beside her, they having witnessed the ceremony from the choir stalls.

Involuntarily, to avoid a painful meeting, Zinka presses forward. But Gabrielle has meanwhile exchanged greetings with her friends. There is general conversation. The Jatinskys are all very friendly to Zinka, this time; even Polyxena shakes hands. Sempaly alone holds aloof.

As they leave St. Peter's the air strikes chilly, almost sharply, upon Zinka's face. She shivers. All at once she hears a well-

known voice say, bruskly, close behind her—"You are too lightly dressed, and the air is infected with fever. Let me put this round you," and Sempaly infolds her in a wrap he was carrying for one of his cousins.

"Thank you, I am not at all cold. Your cousins will be needing it," exclaims Zinka quickly, resisting his endeavors.

Polyxena is silent, perhaps thinking it somewhat odd that her cousin, in his concern for the little stranger, should seem to have totally forgotten that she or her sister might be catching cold. But Nini exclaims, with ready good nature :

"Oh, no, Fraulein. We are well wrapped."

Count Truyn's servant, who had been looking out for his master in the crowd, now coming up, told the count that his carriage was waiting.

And while Zinka, sitting beside Gabrielle, wrapped in Nini's China crepe shawl, rolls past the plashing fountains, over the Angel's Bridge, and through the deserted, ill-lit streets leading to the Palazetto, every nerve within her thrills once more, and the stars above in the deep, blue sky are shining with unnatural brightness. Her grief is resuscitated, and with it the terribly enticing specter of her lost joys. Heavens ! how clearly it all comes back to her

mind—with what terrible clearness—that long, dreamy afternoon in the Palatine, those wonderful hours in the lonely Corsini gardens under the plantains by the fountain, where he told her of Erzburg, while the scent of violets and irises rose so intoxicatingly round her! Oh! the sound of his voice, the touch of his light, slender hand, his smile, his peculiar way of saying certain words, of looking at her at times.

Once more she wanders with him through the Vatican, intoxicated with the beauty of the long rows of statuary. The fountains of the Belvedere plash in monotonous dreamy accents. A golden shimmer of light glides across the marble floors, like golden footprints left behind them by the gods ere they ascend their pedestals. Through the lofty corridors is a mysterious rustling and whispering as of far-off spirit voices.

Then one time — it was in front San Onofrio's — a soft sun-impregnated mist clouding the atmosphere, at their feet, enveloped in ether, shadowy and fairylike, as though all-pervaded with the spirit of its dead beauty, lay Rome—Rome, the great religious shrine of the whole world; Rome, upon whose monuments and ruins all the vices and virtues of humanity have left their impress—where the

tragedy of Antiquity greets the tragedy of Calvary.

They had gazed long in silence upon it; then she had missed a little bunch of violets she wore, and, stooping to look for it, she saw that he had quietly picked up the flowers, and was pressing them to his lips. Her eyes met his. Yes, he had loved her—loved her truly—loved her still. She knew it. She told herself that, impulsive, excitable as he was, the merest chance incident might yet bring him back to her.

Whether it were wise to yearn so unreasonably after one who was the sport of every wind that blew, she did not ask herself!

And all amid the tormenting ghost-like visions of her memory—amid the stamping of the horses' hoofs and noise of the wheels upon the badly paved roads—the "Miserere mei" was ringing in her ears.

But her thoughts were not of the Christ who suffered for man's sins. The stoutest angel's wings avail not to carry us up to Heaven while our hearts drag us down to earth.

"Good-night," she said, absently kissing Gabrielle, as the carriage drew up at the Palazetto.

"Will you not lend me Nini's shawl for the

child?" asked Truyn, detaining her. "I am afraid my little comrade has taken a chill."

"Oh, indeed, I trust not!" cried Zinka alarmed. Then, wrapping her in its soft folds with maternal solicitude, she kissed Gabrielle repeatedly. "Shall I never learn to think of anybody but myself?" she thought, with a rush of angry shame.

CHAPTER II.

HOLY WEEK is over. The bells of the many churches, which have been stilled in mute rigidity during the period of meditation upon the solemn scene on Mount Calvary, once more sound their brazen tongues. It is Easter Monday. Representations of the Resurrection in sugar, wax, soap, etc., ornament the windows of all the bon-bon shops and grocers of Rome. Baroness Wolnitzska has returned more cheerful and enterprising than ever from her flight to Naples, where she not only had had herself photographed leaning in poetic attitude against a column of the ruins of Pompeii, but

had also, despite difficulties caused by her corpulence, with the aid of two guides and an uncommonly sturdy mule, effected the ascent of Mount Vesuvius. Thanks to the good offices of the nephew of a cardinal, with whom she had started a conversation in the railway station, in the hope of making him of some use, she has at last succeeded in obtaining, if not exactly a private audience of the Pope, at any rate the privilege of attending His Holiness's private mass, and, in company with some three hundred other devout Catholics, of receiving the Elements from his own hand.

This morning she has visited the Palazetto, for the several purposes of taking leave of her sister Clotilde, of inquiring for the last time, with her customary tact, about Count Sempaly, of giving a detailed account of the ceremony at the Vatican, and holding a philosophical disquisition upon Holy Communion in general.

Slava, whose Catholicism has now reached a pitch of enthusiasm, and who on Good Friday heroically made the ascent of the Scala Santa upon her knees, finished up her mother's account with the following interesting details:

"It was very exclusive, you know. We were quite among ourselves, only one or two other families belonging to Polish society. I wore

my black satin dress, embroidered with jet beads; and I heard a gentleman behind me say, 'This is the only lady whose veil is tastefully arranged.'"

Sterzl has not entered an appearance during their call; Zinka has smiled sweetly but absently at their conversation; Baroness Clotilde has put endless questions to her sister.

Now the Wolnitzskys have hurried away to attend once more, at the invitation of the cardinal's nephew, the consecration of a bishop, at which the ladies are to be refreshed with ices and flowers in the sacristy.

It might have been about six o'clock when General Klinger entered the drawing-room of the Palazetto that evening. The room no longer had the charming inhabited look of yore. The furniture was now symmetrically arranged in the tasteless conventional manner of servants' handiwork, and the once charming floral arrangements had given place to vases filled with ordinary bunches of violets and magnolias. Zinka no longer thought of arranging the flowers.

"How nice of you to come to-day," she cried, as he entered, the feverish sparkle in her eyes and her crimsoned lips betraying the presence of that springtide fever which causes

such maddening torture to young hearts on warm days in April and May.

She was sitting by Cecil on the red divan where she had so often sat with Sempaly. At a little distance was the baroness, leaning back in an armchair, fanning herself. Her whole person breathed an air of triumphant solemnity. Even Cecil seemed in unusual spirits; although not betraying it by any alteration in his usual manner.

"Good-day, general! What disagreeable sultry weather it is," lisped the baroness. "It is incredible that you should find us *all* at home together; but we *all* have the most holy horror of the crowded streets on these holiday afternoons."

"Oh, mamma!" broke in Zinka. "It is not only the holiday throng that has kept us at home, but because we wanted to enjoy our happiness together. Did we not, Cecil?"

"Yes, Zini," he acquiesced, passing his hand over her hair.

"Only think, uncle. You may perhaps have heard that Cecil's book upon Persia has made a great sensation; but that is not all. He has been appointed *Charge d'Affaires* to Constantinople."

The general congratulated Sterzl, shaking him warmly by the hand as he did so.

"I could not have desired a better post," said Sterzl. "There is always work to be done there. It is the place in which to make one's services available, and to get on."

He showed his satisfaction honestly, and without affecting any arrogant indifference concerning the distinction awarded him.

"In another five years you will be embassador, my dear boy," said the general, with the encouraging spirit of exaggeration never absent on such occasions.

"Promotion is not quite so rapid as all that," laughed Sterzl. "Yet I have hopes of attaining to it some day. Should you feel proud of me, Butterfly, if I were to be styled Excellency?"

"I am already proud of you," she exclaimed. "You know my vanity, and how much importance I attach to such things."

It was the first time for weeks that the general had seen the brother and sister so affectionate to one another; and it rejoiced his heart.

"It is a good climate," continued Sterzl. "I am told the best in all Europe; and there is pleasant society in the European colony. You will be interested at being able to get such a bird's-eye view of Oriental manners and

customs, Zini; and the change of air will do you good."

"Are you going to take me with you?" she asked, a sudden pallor overspreading her cheeks.

"Why, of course, goose. The Golden Horn is splendid, Zini, and we must have our caïque and row about; and if I can manage it for time, in autumn we can make little excursions into Grecee. What a traveled little person you will be, Zini!" and kindly putting his forefinger under her chin, he looked with anxious affection into her thin little face, from which now every vestige of color had fled; even the light which joy at her brother's success had kindled in Zinka's blue eyes had faded.

"It will be very delightful," she answered faintly, "very delightful. Thank you, dear Cecil. You are always so kind. When do we start?"

"In a week you could be ready. You will not find the sea voyage fatiguing; you can have a rest at Athens. In the hot weather we will go to the hills—" Looking intently into her eyes, his expression abruptly changed. With knit brows, he cried, almost roughly, "If you don't want to go, you can stay here. I have no desire to force you!" Here the maid, entering, announced the arrival of a box from the railway station.

"Our new ball dresses!" exclaimed the baroness, in high excitement. "I *am* glad that they have arrived in time. I should have been *au désespoir* if we had had no new dresses to appear in for the Brancaleone's ball. It would have seemed such a want of consideration to the dear princess. I wonder what Fanet has devised for us this time?" and the silly woman rustled out of the room. Meanwhile Zinka, looking like a condemned prisoner whose day of execution has just been announced, nervously twisting her fingers, went on:

"Of course I will go, Cecil. Now can you suppose. . . . And we might start on Wednesday week — Wednesday will be best. . . . Now I must go and see my new dress. Do not laugh at me, uncle. I want to be as smart as possible on my farewell appearance."

And she went so hurriedly to the door that she struck against a table and knocked down a book in her feverish haste. Pausing, she picked up the book, turned over its pages, replaced it, and turning hesitatingly, and as if asking pardon for some wrong committed, laid her transparent hand upon her brother's shoulder. "Thank you, dear," she murmured. "I am really, really glad and proud of you! and—"

He looked up at her, his eyes met hers. His face quivered with anger—that anger which

noble, unselfish, but despotic natures experience when they feel themselves powerless to make those they love happy. Terrified at his expression, she shrank back. "Ah, my ball dress," she cried, and rushed away.

For a while there reigned perfect silence. Then the general said :

"Is Zinka going to the Brancaleone's to-morrow ? "

"Yes," responded Sterzl. "At least, so she promised me. Whether she may change her mind at the last moment and stay at home it is impossible to say," and he drummed impatiently upon the table near which he was sitting.

"Ah well ! she seems pleased at the thought of going this time," resumed the general. "She is evidently interested in her dress for the occasion."

"Her dress ! She had not the remotest idea what she was talking about. She simply rushed away that she might conceal her tears," cried Sterzl violently, losing all self-command. Then looked moodily at the general, as though angry with himself at having disclosed a secret. But the old man's sad face seemed to pacify him. "It is useless to try to disguise it from you," he said. "You must indeed have been blind had you not seen her

misery. It is all over, general. Her heart is breaking!"

Springing up, he paced rapidly up and down the room once or twice, stood still, and, with a despairing gesture, spasmodically shrugged his shoulders as he murmured:

"No help for her—no help!" and sitting down, covered his face with his hands.

The good old general cleared his throat, sought in vain for some words of consolation, and could only say:

"It will all come right again. Only have patience!"

"Patience!" repeated Sterzl, with indescribable accent, "patience! Ah, if only I dared hope that things would be better! Look, general! At first I was enraged that she let her trouble be so apparent. She ought to have pulled herself together more, I thought. But now. Good God! she is doing all she can; and that she is dying by inches is no fault of hers. If she would only be angry! But no; she accuses no one. She is contented with everything; she never even contradicts mamma now! And then—and it is the worst of all—her room is over mine, and night after night I hear her walking up and down for hours, softly—oh, so softly!—so as not to wake any one. And sometimes I

hear her crying. She never cries in the daytime!" He drew a deep breath. "Were it even for the sake of a man!" he muttered. "But that blue-eyed, shuffling, worthless scoundrel! . . . I never ought to have brought her away from her home; never ought to have allowed him to come to the house. I knew that he was not good enough for her, even if he, as I fondly imagined—you may well laugh at my blindness—had had the condescension to entertain serious intentions toward her. . . . Ah! general, you do not know what it is to have to meet the fellow daily, and to hear his eternal 'How are your ladies?' Confound him! I feel inclined to throttle him, to crush him like a worm under my heel. And I have to be courteous—dare not show him the harm he has done me!"

Just then the baroness swept in again.

"*Superbe!*" she exclaimed with her mincing airs. "Superbe! Zinka has never had a costume that will become her so well."

"That's right," observed Sterzl absently. "But where is Zinka?"

"She is lying down, she has a bad headache," lisped the baroness. "The young girls of the present day really are fit for nothing. At her age, I—"

But the general, not being in the mood to ex-

change youthful recollections with his affected friend, here took his leave. In the vestibule he said, with a warm grasp of Sterzl's hand:

"Fortune favors you, my dear boy. You have a brilliant future before you. And Zinka, in her new, most pleasant surroundings will soon forget—" Then, with a farewell clasp of the hand:

"All good be with you in your new life!"

Yes . . . his new life!

CHAPTER III.

PALAZZO BRANCALEONE is one of the finest in Rome, and is situated upon the declivity of the Quirinal. Specially famed are its gardens, which ascend the hill in terraces, the ground floor of the palace opening direct upon them.

Dancing was going on in the ball-room, which opened into a spacious domed gallery. The walls hung with pictures alternating with mirrors. Subduing the warmer tints of the pictures was placed here and there some piece of antique sculpture in cold, stern marble. Many-hued chandeliers of costly Venetian glass were suspended from the ceiling. At the ex-

treme end of this gallery, and separated from it by columns, two steps led to a sanctuary wherein were hung the choicest gems of the Brancaleone collection, although unfortunately side by side with many a specimen of coarser modern handiwork ; thence a door led out into the gardens.

Zinka arrived late. A certain feverish excitement at first lent her complexion its lost freshness, while a look of melancholy diffidence made her even more attractive than she had formerly been in her naïve consciousness of triumph. Her ball dress was perfection. Evidently she had not lost all her charm of manner, for soon she had quite a court of young Roman dandies about her; there were even a few seceders from those which swelled the young Countesses Jatinsky's train.

Count Truyn was not present. The chill caught by his little daughter in Holy Week was unfortunately threatening to take a serious turn ; and he did not leave her bedside.

Zinka never looked so well as when dancing. With head thrown lightly back, dreamy eyes, and gliding movements, she excited general admiration. The music, the brilliant lights, the consciousness that she was being admired, all tended to raise her spirits. Her eyes roved round the throng. No — he was not there.

Sterzl stood leaning in a doorway chatting with the general and rejoicing in his sister's loveliness and success. Many distinguished personages congratulated him upon his appointment. He thanked them simply and cordially. Things seemed prospering with him. Shortly after midnight he was called away to Palazzo Venezia on urgent matters; there was much disturbance in the diplomatic world at that time.

Soon after he left came Sempaly. He had, it was generally known, been up all the night before gambling—a new passion of his—had lost heavily, and was now looking haggard and low-spirited. A lazy dancer, he had put off asking either of his pretty cousins for the cotilion, until so late that both were engaged —a fact received by him with such open indifference that Nini shed secret tears over it.

Now, carelessly reclining in the embrasure of a window, glass in eye, he was making caustic remarks to the men lounging with him about the figure or face of this or that girl, doing his best to imagine himself transformed into Macaulay's typical New Zealander, making his appearance for the first time in civilized society. Suddenly he was silent; something or another had arrested his attention.

The band was playing the waltz of the season

—Tosti's "Stringi Mi." The atmosphere of the ball-room began to grow oppressive. It was the time when girls' hair begins to lose its correct smoothness, and when their movements, which at the commencement have been somewhat stiff and conscious, begin to assume something of languishing suppleness. A kind of electricity seems in the air, causing even the most indifferent on-looker to experience something of inward excitement.

Crespigny and Zinka glided by. Amid the excitement around her Zinka alone remained pale and calm. She was not living in the present; she was dreaming. All at once Crespigny, who was a bad waltzer, collided with another couple, caught his foot in the lady's train, and fell, dragging his partner with him. With impulsive want of consideration, Sempaly pressed through the crowd, and before any one else could do so, had raised Zinka from the ground. Without paying the slightest heed to the many pair of eyes directed upon him, he bent over her; her former power over him was reinstated. Confused and dizzy, she was hardly aware at first who had come to her assistance, as with closed eyes she clung to his arm. At his first whispered words of sympathy, she, looking up, blushed and shrank visibly away from him.

"What an unpleasant Intermezzo!" "Most unpleasant!" whispered some of the ladies. Meanwhile, pressing Zinka's little hand with tender force on to his arm, Sempaly led her out of the heated ballroom into one of the adjoining rooms.

CHAPTER IV.

THE chance she had besought from Heaven had come about—the chance that brought them together once more. His old love had reawakened. She knew it—she read it in his eyes. Now she exercised all her self-control to conceal her joy, not from a spirit of calculating coquetry, but from noble womanly reserve. He spoke the wildest passionate nonsense; she interrupted him with demure commonplaces.

He had gone to fetch her opera cloak. Wrapped in its white folds, she sauntered with him among the palms and statuary; now and then meeting an acquaintance she would stop and exchange a few words. The gallery

became more and more deserted. The pause for supper had intervened; every one had betaken themselves to the buffet. Zinka's cold manner, for which he was by no means prepared, increased Sempaly's excitement. A sudden feeling came over him that there could be nothing more delicious in the whole world than to hold her in his arms and kiss her wellnigh to death. Every nerve in his body yearned for that one blessed moment. He had no thought for anything else. He must win her at any price, were he and she, and all the world besides, to pay the forfeit of it.

"Zinka," he whispered hoarsely, "Zinka, Lent is over and gone—Easter has come!"

"What do you mean?" she asked almost sharply, still maintaining her self-control.

"I mean"—his glowing eyes still fixed upon her face—"I mean that I have done my penance to the full; and that now I mean to be happy."

They were standing in the smaller raised apartment, separated from the great gallery by columns. They were alone. A wild joy akin to pain seized Zinka, flowing through her veins like a sweet anodyne; but still she remained silent, unsmiling, not once raising her eyes to his. She could not have smiled had she wished it ever so much—she was as if stupefied.

He thought her purposely deaf to his words.

"Zinka," he implored, "will you not forgive me that for the past six weeks I have been going about jingling a fool's cap, to prevent myself from hearing the music of the spheres? Will you not forgive me for the sake of the torture I have been enduring all this time? I swear, by Heaven! I can endure it no longer. Whether I sink or swim I cannot live without you!"

Her enfeebled strength was not equal to such vehemence; the frightful nervous strain her pride had lain upon her in the last quarter of an hour relaxed; a shudder ran through her frame, she held out her hands helplessly for support, tottered, and almost fell. His arm was thrown protectingly round her, while with his other hand he pushed open the door leading out into the garden.

"Let us go out here, the air will revive you," he murmured, scarce intelligibly.

They went out into the silent garden. His arm closed more firmly round her, he drew her to him. Involuntarily he waited for some movement of resistance on her part, some terrified struggle to break away from him; but no, looking up at him blissfully, her eyes overflowing with tears, she whispered:

"I ought not to forgive you so easily," and

fearlessly, confidingly, as a sick child nestles to her mother's breast, she suffered her head to sink upon his shoulder, sobbing out her happiness.

A strange feeling came over him. From below the sound of church bells trembled up to them on the still night air. Gently kissing her brow with tender reverence he murmured: "My bride, my sacred treasure!"

She was saved.

CHAPTER V.

When General Klinger left the card-room, in the act of departure he cast a last hurried glance into the ball-room, where the cotilion, with its pretty measures and recherché gifts, was drawing to a close.

"How foolish it is to give a ball in this weather!" moaned a row of oppressed chaperones. Among them he observed the baroness, who, with very disconcerted expression, eyeglass to her eye, was looking round the room. Siegburg, who, the general knew, was to have danced the cotilion with Zinka, was not danc-

ing. As the general neared him, to ask the reason of his defection, he said, quietly, "he thought Zinka had felt unwell, and had gone home."

The manner in which he volunteered it led the general to think that he had merely said this to cover some unexpected proceeding on Zinka's part. He had seen her last in the picture gallery with Sempaly—he hastened off to seek her there. Vainly he looked in every floral nook. He went into the boudoir beyond; that too was empty, but the door leading into the gardens stood open. Mystified, he hastened out.

Without, there reigned an indescribably damp oppressive atmosphere. A hopeless sense of weariness and of suppressed excitement came over him. The sirocco with its deadly oppression was brooding over Rome.

Northerners, who have never been to Rome, can form no idea of the nature of the sirocco. Most of them think of it as a hot wind.

Not so; it is when the air is sultry but damp, and filled with subtle perfume, that the sirocco mixes its poison with it. It extracts it from the scent of the flowers, which it calls into life only to kill; from the mists of the Tiber, whose yellow waves it goldens as they roll over its dead bodies and sunken treasures; from the

mouldy breath of graves, and from the smoke of the incense from Roman churches. The sirocco tricks the imagination with alluring deceptions, and fills the heart with an oppressive sadness; it inspires the will to deeds of greatness, and sinks the body in sensuous indolence upon soft couches. It penetrates even to cool monastic cells. It breathes across the pale faces of devout young nuns wrestling in prayer, recalling to them old, dear memories. And all that is tragic and shameful, and much of what is lovely, in Rome is born of the sirocco; creator of exquisite imaginings, and of deeds of horror. It almost seems as if since that day when Cæsar fell under Brutus's dagger the sirocco and tramontana had fought their last fight over Rome —and the sirocco had remained conqueror!

A gray mist clouded the sky, veiling the disk of the already waning moon. Dreamily flowed the waters of the cascade which falls from fountain to fountain down the terraces of the Quirinal Hill. Pale sober morning already began to disperse the witchery of moonlight and of the night. Lights and shadows had disappeared. All around was colored as with the gray washed-out tones of a half-effaced pastel.

The general cast searching glances down the

walks, bordered on either side by stiff laurels, which ran parallel to the terraces. Majestic evergreen oaks, overgrown with ivy and climbing roses, stood up here and there from among the laurels. Ever and anon something white would gleam forth from amid the dull green. He would hurry toward it to find it was a statue or a cluster of flowers.

Roses and magnolias stretched forth their calyxes as if listening. Overpowering every other perfume was the scent of orange blossoms in the sirocco-laden air. From time to time through the leaves, like a gentle shudder or low sigh, a falling flower would glide to earth.

The old general felt as if he could not breathe. "Zinka, Sempaly!" he cried.

There was no answer.

Suddenly he distinguished the sound of a low whispering from the famous Sarcophagus avenue. He hurried thither. The light of early morning fell through an opening in the leafy screen. There, upon a bank, sat Zinka and Sempaly hand in hand, world-forgetting, telling all their love.

Zinka was the first to perceive the general. She was quite unabashed.

"Ah, uncle," said she, "mamma is looking for me, is she not? Please do not scold me."

Good heavens! the sweet innocent eyes raised to his! Over such purity even the sirocco had no power. No; the general could not possibly be angry with her—but he!

"Sempaly!" he cried, indignantly. "What in the world has possessed you?"

"I have made up my mind to secure my happiness," he returned, warmly pressing Zinka's hand to his lips as he spoke. "That is all."

"I ought not to have forgiven him so easily, ought I?" whispered Zinka, lowering her head, intimidated by the general's look of severity.

"Zinka has been missed. You know how evil the world is!" cried the general hastily, without in the least respecting the sentiment of the situation.

Sempaly interrupted him with impatient gesture:

"I was just on the point of taking Zinka back to the ball-room to announce our engagement to certain of my near friends and relations," he said, meditatively. But the next moment he had reconsidered it.

"No," he cried, uneasily, "I can't — no; unfortunately, I can't just yet. I must even beg you, Zinka, not to mention a word of our engagement to your own people for the present."

"Make haste, Zinka!" exclaimed the general dryly, "my cab is waiting in the piazza. If I do not mistake there is a small gate somewhere here leading out on to it. Right; here it is. I will tell your mother before several witnesses that, not feeling well, you went home with Lady Julia *before the cotilion.*"

When Zinka, in the care of the general's faithful old coachman, had driven off to the Palazetto, the two men looked each other in the face.

"Unheard of!" exclaimed the general hotly.

Sempaly fired up. "You may think as ill of me as you choose, but do not cast the shadow of an impure suspicion upon Zinka. You know that if you hold up a cross before the very devil himself his power is gone!"

Without deigning him a reply the general, striding past Sempaly, went hurriedly through the garden toward the ball-room, and found himself in time unperceived to fasten the door of the boudoir leading in to the grounds. Reaching the ball-room he replied to the baroness's breathless inquiries.

"Zinka felt indisposed after the fall, and drove home with Lady Julia Ellis some time ago." This he said in a loud voice, and in French, so as to be heard and understood by those standing near.

"She might have let me know!" exclaimed the baroness, petulantly.

"We did look for you, baroness, but unfortunately could not find you," he replied.

For the first time in his life he had uttered a lie.

The next morning he visited Lady Julia at an unearthly hour to initiate her into the mysteries of the past night, that she might not, unawares, contradict his statement. As he himself had escorted Lady Julia to her carriage it all seemed plain sailing. As unaccustomed as was the general to lying, she yet showed herself most ready to confirm his fiction, saying over and over again: "Poor, dear child! I hope it may all come right!"

CHAPTER VI.

"DEAREST ZINKA, my own sweet little wife. My brother arrived unexpectedly to-day. He is on his way to Australia, and, luckily, only intends remaining a few days. But while he is here I see nothing for it but to deny myself

and see as little as possible of you, that he may not have the remotest suspicion of our engagement.

"Shall I confess to you the plain sober reason which compels me to conceal my happiness from him? In order to kill time during these last hateful weeks I have been playing high and losing heavily, and am over head and ears in debt. My brother will pay my debts, as he has done before, as long as my circumstances remain normal.

"But—but—I cannot set it down in black and white. Only do not for one instant believe that his narrow views can influence me against you; however much I may appear to yield to his wishes. Only I consider it undesirable to arouse his anger just now. But as soon as he has sailed, there will remain no further obstacle to our making our engagement publicly known. We then can marry immediately. Once done, he will reconcile himself to the *fait accompli*. If only possible, I will come round to the Palazetto some time in the course of the evening for a loving word and kiss. Till then, imploring your implicit silence, I am

"Your own devoted,

"N. S."

This letter Zinka received the morning after

the ball, as, somewhat later than her usual hour, she was breakfasting with considerably renewed appetite in her own room alone. Her color changed. Her eyes flashed with indignant fire. She had borne his coldness and neglect; but such a proof of petty feeling, of moral cowardice, as that displayed by his letter, lowered him even to meanness in her eyes. Now it was to her as if a sudden light was thrown upon his character—as if it was some other, not himself, she had loved. The Sempaly of her love was a proud, god-like hero, who, from his lofty height, might allow himself, did fate so order it, to break the heart of a poor, simple girl, who had been so greatly blessed as to have come across his path; but he was no poor-spirited, nervous weakling, content to adopt any petty deception from fear of facing an outbreak of brotherly anger. She was furious. All her pride, slumbering in these anguished weeks, rose up in arms. Sitting down at once to her writing-table, she wrote as follows:

"To have married you against your brother's will would have been possible to me, but to do so behind his back is a thing to which I could never persuade myself. I could brave him, but never deceive him. If you do not come to the Palazetto I shall know you have made your de-

cision. Only when I am convinced that I am more necessary to your happiness than is your brother's opinion can I hold out my hand to you. In the meanwhile, I absolve you from every claim I have upon you, and efface from my memory every word which in the excitement of last night you may have uttered.

"Yours sincerely,

"ZINKA STERZL."

Having folded and placed this categorical epistle in an envelope, Zinka addressed it, and ringing for her maid desired her to take the note instantly to Palazzo di Venezia.

"Am I to wait for an answer?" asked the maid.

"No," replied Zinka curtly.

Hardly had she left the room than poor Zinka grew terribly agitated, almost repenting having written so indignantly. She might still have said all that there was in the letter, but without taking so hard a tone! Then reading his letter again, she knitted her pretty brows and shook her head. Just then her eyes fell upon a second note, which had been brought her at the same time with Sempaly's, but had hitherto been unnoticed by her. Recognizing Truyn's handwriting, she opened it hurriedly; it contained but few words:

"DEAR ZINKA—My poor little Gabrielle has grown rapidly worse since last evening. The doctor gives but little hope. She is longing for you so sorely both when conscious and in her delirium. Come, if you can,

"Your old friend,

"TRUYN.

"P. S. It is nothing of an infectious nature —inflammation of the lungs."

Zinka started up—happiness, pain, indignation, everything connected with Sempaly was forgotten; she thought only of the constant goodness shown by Truyn to her, and of the grief now threatening him.

"No infectious illness," she murmured to herself. "Poor fellow! even now his thought is for others—while I—I—" A flush of shame burned in her cheeks, as she remembered that evening in Holy Week, when Gabrielle had shivered beside her in the carriage; and she had had no thought for her.

"I had quite lost my head because he had spoken a kind word to me," she said, angry at her own weakness. A few minutes later she was hurrying breathlessly along the Corso toward Piazza di Spagna. Her maid could scarce keep up with her. She does not see what is going on about her, does not notice any

one, and, arrived in Piazza di Spagna, nearly runs into a group just emerging from the Hotel de Londres, then feels her arm touched by a soft hand. Looking up, she recognizes Nini Jatinsky.

"Good morning. Where are you hurrying so fast?" asks the young countess in friendly voice.

Zinka returns her greeting hurriedly, absently. "I am hastening to the Hotel de l'Europe. Gabrielle Truyn seems to be very ill, and is asking for me."

Now Zinka becomes aware of a tall, broad-shouldered man of haughty bearing and sunburned face standing by Nini. He looks at her with an air of gentlemanly approval, and Nini introduces him as Prince Sempaly. Now, too, she sees Nicholas Sempaly following with Polyxena. There was a passionate fire burning in his eyes; yet he merely raises his hat with distant courtesy. Zinka gives no thought to his behavior; the whole encounter has made not the slightest impression upon her; her one feeling is that she is being detained.

"Excuse me, countess," she says with friendly smile to Nini, and, quite oblivious of the social chasm between them, holding out her hand to her. "Poor Count Truyn is expecting me!" and she sped away.

"Who is that charming girl, Nini!" asked the prince. "Of course you forgot to name her to me."

"A Fraulein Sterzl, sister to one of the secretaries to our Embassy," replied Nini.

"Sterzl?" returned the prince in some disappointment.

"Zenaide Sterzl," cried Polyxena, mockingly, over her shoulder.

But the prince pays no heed to the comic stress she has laid upon the singular combination of the romantic and plebeian in the name. Too much the grand seigneur to amuse himself at the expense of lesser folk, he merely says:

"Sterzl — I know the name — Sterzl — ah! yes! I served for a time under a Colonel Sterzl of the X—— Lancers. He was a fine fellow."

Meanwhile Zinka was hastening on to Hotel de l'Europe. In the sunny courtyard two large rose bushes, one red, one white, were in full bloom. Two small, dark-haired little urchins in a corner were fencing with sticks. Two English families were preparing for some party of pleasure in commodious landaus, sending back to the hotel for endless things forgotten. One of the English girls burst into a merry laugh

at something that was said. Her companion quietly checked her. "Hush!" she murmured, pointing to a window above, "remember the poor sick child."

An icy chill struck Zinka's heart; she hurried up the well-known stairs. In the drawing-room Gabrielle's English governess was sitting very upright, very concerned, and very helpless.

"May I go in to see the little invalid?" asked Zinka.

"Not just now. The doctor is there."

At that moment Count Truyn came out of the sick room with the celebrated Doctor E——, the German consulting physician, and greeting Zinka sorrowfully, escorted him to his carriage.

On Truyn's face was that fixed expression and dead white hue to be seen on the faces of affectionate, unselfish men, who are accustomed to fight out their sorrows alone.

Returning to the drawing-room, he took her hand in his. "The little one has been asking for you every minute," he said, "but"— shaking his head as he looked into her moist eyes and saw the pale, convulsed face—"will you be able to hide your anxiety from our little darling?"

"Trust me," answered Zinka, bravely wip-

ing her eyes. A few seconds later she gently glided into the sick-room, calm and cheerful as a sunbeam.

CHAPTER VII.

SOME one must either have watched Zinka and Sempaly in their moonlight walk, or, despite the general's precautions, have gained scent of it; the result being a scurrilous article which appeared in a Franco-Roman society paper, on the Friday after the ball.

The article was headed "A Moonlight Cotillion." It began with an exact description of Zinka's person, who was presented under the guise of "Fräulein Z——a St——l, sister to one of the Secretaries of the Austrian Embassy," mentioned the sensation excited by the said young lady as Lady Jane Grey, in the *tableaux vivants*, at Countess Ilsenbergh's; described her as a clever adventuress, one of the professional beauties of Rome, and spoke of her unsuccessful attempts to win for herself a princely coronet; efforts which had culminated in a moonlight escapade at a ball recently given by a leader of

Roman society, the audacity of which had exceeded all that the *chronique scandaleuse* of Roman fashion had yet known. "Will her companion bestow *his coronet* upon her? Will *High Life* shortly have a fashionable wedding to announce? That is now the question," concluded the article.

High Life—such was the name of the journal containing the above-mentioned article—was a paper openly scouted by society, patronized secretly by a certain portion of it, and though spoken of with the greatest horror and indignation by the majority, yet read by nearly all.

On that eventful Friday *High Life* was sold out. Before the sun had set, Zinka's name was in every one's mouth. What did Rome say to the article? Lady Julia wept, drank tea, and betook herself to her bed. Mr. Ellis said "shocking!" assured his wife that he was convinced of Zinka's innocence, and that "it would all dry straight." After which he phlegmatically occupied himself with other things, and practiced a difficult passage on the concertina for two hours without a stop.

The Bräuers, already mentioned as countrymen of the Sterzls, partly in Roman society, but who had not received invitations to the Brancaleone ball, did their part to spread the article, in which good action each had motives

of their own. Fra Bräuer, assuming an air of perfidious sympathy, said that the affair was very damaging to Zinka's reputation; although, as far as she was concerned, she saw no great harm in an innocent little moonlight promenade with an intimate friend. Herr Bräuer, who had received but little notice from the combined Sterzl family—the baroness through haughtiness, Zinka and Cecil merely because he was such an utterly shallow, pretentious person—affirmed, with the most ironical of smiles, that, for his part, the "touch-me-not" manner of the little adventuress, who had pushed her way in such barefaced manner into circles to which she had no right, had never pleased him. He had always thought her conduct unbecoming. It must be highly annoying to the Duchess Brancaleone that such a scandalous affair should have occurred under her roof; but doubtless she would be more careful in future in the choice of her guests. Mesdames Ferguson and De Gaudry thought the article amusingly written, but would not themselves have mentioned such an incident for the world! One really would not be safe for a moment if such gossip were encouraged; though, certainly, in either of their cases, the newspaper correspondent would have had to invent, which, in Zinka's case, had evidently not been neces-

sary. They moreover sent copies of the paper to all their friends and acquaintances, with a few lines to the effect that the affair proved how necessary it was to be guarded about receiving total strangers into society. Zinka had seemed to them "suspecte" from the very first—"car après tout, ce n'est pas du vrai monde!"

Princess Vulpini, in whose presence the two ladies allowed themselves to make similar impertinent and slanderous remarks was furious. It was in General Klinger's studio that they met, society's favorite resort; a species of Forum where every one gathered when any subject of social interest was stirring.

"I happen to be an Austrian, ladies," said the princess, "and, therefore, have been brought up with ideas of exclusiveness of caste such as you can neither conceive nor understand. In every respect my feelings are rigidly conservative. But Zinka Sterzl is one of Nature's gentle women, one of the élite who form the exception to the rule. I should have esteemed it mere folly and narrow-mindedness had I, in deference to social dogmatism, denied myself the privilege of intercourse with one so charming in mind and person."

"Exceptions generally come off badly," muttered the general.

Countess Ilsenbergh, who was as punctilious in questions of honor as of etiquette, was greatly annoyed at the article. She made some severe remarks upon the freedom of the press; and expressed her conviction that, whether Zinka were innocent or not, things looked ill for Sempaly.

Count Ilsenbergh developed a surprising power of eloquence, and gave a stupendous oration upon the social question. "Our honored princess is quite in the right," said he; "Fraülein Sterzl is a charming exception; and were society disposed to relax its rules in favor of any one, it might well do so for her. But our honored general is also right that exceptions are not favored by the world's opinion; and we cannot afford to see the foundations of society threatened to their very depths in order to lighten the lot of the individual. We dare not institute a precedent!" He went on to enunciate the frightful disorder that must ensue from such a mixing up of classes; referred his audience to France in proof of his opinions; and proposed to the consolidation of European society, and the steadying of ambitious spirits, that the introduction of the laws of Indian caste should be rigidly carried out among them.

European society had not yet attained to

the height of perfect exclusivism to which he pointed; and that, therefore, instead of aiming at the introduction of laws of Indian caste, they would do better to consider the distressing circumstance before them. He replied that the thing was plain. Either *High Life* had lied, and Sempaly had only energetically to deny the article, prove an alibi, and give the editor a sound horsewhipping; or if, on the contrary, the statement published in *High Life* were a fact, then, under the circumstances, and having borne an umblemished reputation hitherto, there remained nothing for Sempaly"—here he shrugged his shoulders.

"But to make Fraulein Sterzl Countess Sempaly!" interposed the Gaudry. "I must say I think it rather hard that a young adventuress should be rewarded for her unmaidenly conduct by a coronet. Oh, I beg your pardon, general, I had really quite forgotten that you were a friend of the Sterzl family!"

"And I," cried the general, who, white with anger, had sprung from his seat, his voice shaking with indignation, "by heavens, madame, I had quite forgotten that I was in the presence of a lady!"

Princess Vulpini here took up the argument.

"You have told us yourself, countess, that from the very first you avoided all intimacy

with Fraulein Sterzl. Well, since her arrival in Rome, I have met her almost daily; I have had opportunity of observing her manner with young men, have heard her conversation with girls of her own age, and I can confidently assure you that the word 'unmaidenly' applied to her behavior is as appropriate as it would be to that of my youngest daughter, who is just three years old! And if she really did go out into the grounds on the night of the ball with my cousin, I am convinced it was merely a piece of girlish romance, a proof of such excessive innocence of feeling that it should, on the face of it, have shielded her from all harm. This very evening I have been watching with Zinka by the sick bed of my little niece, and no one, whose soul was clouded by hideous recollections, could have had such pure eyes, such a sweet natural smile, as had she. I would go through fire and water to serve her!"

The princess looked so proud, so earnest, so queenly as she said these words, she measured the Gaudry with such a contemptuous glance, that the latter, involuntarily abashed, and murmuring some unintelligible words, hastily beat a retreat with her inseparable companion, Mrs. Ferguson. The four Austrians remained alone.

"The one I cannot understand throughout is

Sempaly," said the princess. "No sooner had this detestable paper been placed in my hands than I sent round for him to his rooms in Palazzo Venezia. The message came back that he was out driving with the Jatinskys. I drove to Hotel de l'Europe to confer with my brother. He had just fallen asleep; I had not the heart to wake him; he could have done no good, and why disturb his joy in Gabrielle's improvement? And so I came on to open my heart to you, general."

"Sempaly will not have seen the article yet," suggested Ilsenbergh.

The princess shrugged her shoulders. Countess Ilsenbergh gave vent to a final "that the whole thing was highly unpleasant, and she had foreseen it from the first," whereupon her husband manifested such serious intention to indulge the company with a second oration that his wife hastily rose to withdraw. At that very moment Prince Vulpini, his face beaming with delight, entered the studio.

"Ah, vous voita," he cried, "I saw your carriages standing below as I was passing, and ran up to give you the news — do you know the very latest?"

"Sempaly engaged to Zinka!" cried the princess.

"No, no," returned the ultra-papal prince.

"The wind tore down the Italian flag from the Quirinal in the night! Long live the Tramontana!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A FEW minutes later the general was left alone. For a moment he hesitated; then, seizing his hat, he strode hurriedly along to the Palazetto to see how things were going. The last to hear of the scurrilous article, he was one of those most disturbed by it. Perhaps Sempaly had made it all right with Zinka, he said to himself as he hurried his steps. It was the baroness's "at home" day. The frivolous woman was sitting belaced and beflowered, one hand clad in a perfectly fitting pearl gray glove, the other toying with a dish of *foudants*.

"Voita qui est gentil," she cried, as the general entered. This stereotyped form of welcome fluttered from her thin lips at every arrival, without the slightest change of expression, cool and colorless as a snowflake. Hardly had he returned the baroness's greeting than the

general looked round for Zinka, without, at first, seeing her.

Only as a cheerful voice exclaimed: "Here I am, uncle. Come and give me a kiss," did he perceive her leaning back in a large armchair, in the darkest corner of the room; she was looking tired and sleepy, but very happy and lovely.

"Oh, uncle, dear, I am so tired—you would not believe how tired I am!" she exclaimed, caressingly nestling her cheek against his hand, "and my cruel mother will have me remain in the drawing-room, because it is her day; and I have been fast asleep nearly the whole time in my corner, for, fortunately, no one has come. I was sitting up last night and the night before with Gabrielle, and did not once close my eyes. I was so rejoiced that my little darling would not take her medicine from any one but me, and so rejoiced when, last night, soothed by one of my fairy tales, she fell asleep with her head on my shoulder. But then when I had, for fear of waking her, to sit for six hours in one position without daring to stir, it grew agonizing. And to-day I am quite stiff and aching." As she spoke, she stretched her slender neck right and left, with a pretty weary movement of the shoulders.

"You ought to go to bed," said the general with paternal solicitude.

"Oh, no. I was lying down this morning. Besides, my feeling tired is a secondary matter. The great thing is that my little invalid is out of danger. Oh! if anything had happened to her!" She shuddered. "I cannot think what a grief it would have been. Count Truyn persists in declaring that the darling's recovery is due to me; and kissed my hand as gratefully when I came away as if I had been a saint. I believe I laughed and cried at one and the same time, and now my heart is as light—as light as a child's air balloon that has to be held down by a thread, that it may not fly direct up to heaven. But why are you looking so grave, uncle? are you not as glad as I am—" Here the baroness, looking at the clock, began to wonder that no one had called that day. "It is plain that you are 'no one,' uncle; no, only my dear, whimsical old friend," said Zinka with her touching, soft laugh. There was an extraordinary sweet, dreamy grace about her to-day. The old man felt his eyes fill with tears, his heart bleed as he looked at her.

At that moment a quick heavy tread was heard without, the tread of a man bearing a heavy sorrow with him; the door was burst open, and with jaundiced face, gasping, foam on his lips, Sterzl rushed in, a newspaper in his hand.

"What is the matter? What has happened!" cried Zinka in great distress.

Making no answer he looked down at her with a terrible look.

"Is it true that you were in the garden alone with Sempaly on the night of the ball?" His voice rattled in his throat as he spoke.

"Yes," she answered trembling.

He started, staggered; then, drawing himself up, hurled the paper contemptuously at her feet —she, his darling, his sunbeam! "Read it!" he thundered.

The old general would have torn the paper from her hands, but Sterzl held him back with all his force.

"Your forbearance is out of place," he said, faintly. "*She* can read anything."

Zinka read. Suddenly starting up, she uttered a short, sharp cry. The paper fell from her hands.

The alpha and omega of the whole thing she still did not understand—did not take in of what she was accused; only that some hideous, loathsome, shameful thing was implied she did understand.

"Cecil," she cried, revolted, and looked straight, with her great, innocent eyes into her brother's—"Cecil!" then covered with

both hands her face, which, first deathly white, had now grown crimson.

The unreason of his suspicion was clear to him at once; he now bitterly repented his violence and roughness. "Zini, forgive me—I was mad, stark mad!" he cried, endeavoring to fold her in his arms. But she waved him off. "Leave me, leave me!" she groaned. "I cannot forgive you. Oh, Cecil! had all the papers in the world said that you had committed a dishonorable action, do you think that I could have believed it?"

He humbly sank his head. "This is something different, Zini," he murmured. "I do not say it to defend myself, but, indeed, it is different. You cannot even understand it, because you are a child, an angel, my poor, poor butterfly!" He forcibly drew her to his heart, and pressed a sorrowful kiss upon her fair hair; yet her whole bearing was one of strongest resistance to his tenderness.

"What is it all about?" the baroness asked for the twentieth time. Still receiving no answer, she at last stooped and picked up the paper, which lay unheeded on the floor, and, finding the article in question, read a portion of it, then broke out into a storm of invective against her daughter, bringing up all the misdeeds ever committed by Zinka, and especially

those of the last few weeks, ending up with the words: "I should not wonder if you were to ruin Cecil's whole career!"

"Silence, mother!" commanded Sterzl, impatiently. "Who thinks of my career now. It is of our honor we have to think, and of *her* happiness!" Then leaning anxiously over his sister, quivering with horror and grief: "Speak!" he implored. "Speak, Zini! Tell me exactly how it all happened!"

She had disengaged herself from him. With arms crossed upon her bosom, she stood facing him. There was something of rigidity in her bearing, her voice sounded lifeless and monotonous as, with innocent conscientiousness, blushing and trembling, she told her poor little story.

As she came to an end, Sterzl breathed heavily.

"And since then have you heard nothing from Sempaly?"

"He wrote to me the next morning."

"Zinka—do not be angry with me—show me that letter!"

She left the room, and returning, handed Sterzl the letter. He read it through gravely, and evidently with greatest attention, frowned, and asked, as he refolded the letter: "Did you answer him?"

"Yes," she answered shortly.

"And what?"

"Very simply—that I was ready to marry him without his brother's consent; but deceive his brother—I would not!"

In the midst of all his distress, there broke a light of fraternal pride in Sterzl's gloomy eyes.

"Bravo, Zini!" he murmured, "and to this he sent you no answer?"

Zinka had to think back. "No," she said. "Ah, yes, he sent me a note to the Hotel de l'Europe."

"And what was in it?"

"I have not read it yet. It came just when Gabrielle was at the worst, and afterward I forgot it; but"—feeling in the pocket of her blue serge dress—"here it is."

Sterzl, shaking his head, looked curiously at his sister, then opening the letter, read:

"My life, my treasure, my sweet, proud, angry little wife.

"Immediately on receiving your wild letter I rushed off to see you. The *concierge* informed me you had gone to the bedside of your little friend, Gabrielle Truyn. Of course I dare not venture to intrude upon you there; although I feel I would, just now especially, give two years

of my life for a look, a kiss from you. Rather than lose you, I will at once break with all and everything. Command, and I will obey. But yet, no, I must exercise common sense for us both—must at least wait until my affairs have been set in order. Forgive me—it cannot be otherwise. I kiss your hands and the hem of your dress. I feel I am not worthy of you, but I love you beyond everything.

"SEMPALY."

After having read this very characteristic letter, Sterzl paced the room once or twice with heavy steps, finally stopped opposite his sister, took her hand, and kissing it, said :

"Forgive me, Zini. I am proud of you. You have acted like an angel! But he—he is a contemptible scoundrel!"

That she could not bear.

"I do not defend him!" she cried, with raised voice. "But one thing is certain. He loves and *understands* me. He has never doubted me, and—"

She sought in vain for the word she fain would have spoken in his favor—she found none. Then, with painful effort, mustering all her pride, she walked, with head erect, to the door. As it closed behind her, her sobs were audible. The baroness looked as if she

were about to follow her. Sterzl barred the way.

"Where are you going?" he said, sternly.

"To Zinka. I must make it clear to her what she has done. Unheard of! Why, at thirteen I was not so deficient in tact."

Sterzl smiled very bitterly.

"That may be, mother," said he; "yet I must absolutely request you to leave Zinka alone at present. She is suffering enough without that!"

"Is she to be suffered to continue in her stupidity, without my being allowed to reprimand her?" said the baroness, warmly.

"Yes, mother," he said, determinately. "It is not for us to cast reproaches on her. It is our part to protect and comfort her."

The footman announced that dinner was served.

Sterzl pressed the general to stay and dine with them, saying that he had some things to discuss with him afterward. He evidently wished to avoid dining alone with his mother. Before sitting down, he went to Zinka's room to see if she would not, at any rate, take some soup; but came back almost immediately, looking very distressed.

"She would not say a word to me," he murmured; "she is terribly upset."

At table he sat silent, eating nothing, drinking but little; merely crumbling his bread and twisting his table napkin.

Every time the street door opened he seemed to be listening. Dinner was quickly over.

While they were taking coffee in the drawing-room, the footman brought in a letter to Sterzl, who took it hastily, and not recognizing the handwriting, broke the seal. It contained nothing but a half sheet of notepaper, upon which was a sketch thrown off in a few masterly strokes: Sterzl as auctioneer, the hammer in one hand, holding up a little doll in the other; before him the coroneted heads of Rome.

He recognized himself in an instant, and although the ungainliness of his figure was ridiculously exaggerated, he merely shrugged his shoulders as he calmly said, "Do people think that such a thing could annoy me now? Look at it, general! Sempaly is doubtless the author of this work of art."

Of course the general would gladly have destroyed it ere Sterzl had seen the point of it; but before he could carry out his intention, Sterzl, looking over his shoulder, tore it out of his hands.

"There is something written on it," he said, and deciphered in one of the corners, in Sempaly's careless illegible handwriting: "'Mad-

emoiselle Sterzl for the first, for the second, for the third time of asking!' Ah, now I understand!"

The blood rushed to his head. His breath came loud and painfully.

"Its being sent here now is a low trick," cried the general. "Sempaly made the idiotic sketch before he had even seen Zinka. I was there when he did it."

"What matters that?" returned Sterzl; "the fact remains the same. So this is the way the whole thing was looked upon? Well, well — I suppose they were right. I did think that Zinka would make a brilliant marriage. I meant well — but — I have brought contempt upon us all, and have ruined my sister!"

His excitement increased minute by minute. Incessantly he paced up and down, would stop suddenly, go up to the open window, listen to the sounds without, then resume his pacing up and down. "Sempaly is incomprehensible to me," he muttered. "Incomprehensible. I have certainly thought him a poor sort of fellow latterly, but such abominable rascality I did not even give him credit for! What do you think of his keeping out of sight to-day, general?"

"He simply cannot have seen the paper," suggested the general. "He went out early driving with his brother and cousins."

"Well! we will suppose him not to have seen the paper," said Sterzl. "All the same, it is somewhat remarkable, seeing how things stand between himself and Zinka, that he should suffer two whole days to pass without having made an attempt to see her."

The general was silent.

"Humph! you know him better than I do," began Sterzl afresh, after a while, "and you, as my sister related, were present for a short space during this romantic moonlight betrothal. Do you believe that it is his intention to marry Zinka?"

"I know that he is madly in love with her, and even the Ilsenberghs, who were talking it over with Princess Vulpini this afternoon in my studio, do not see, even without reference to his feelings, how he can do anything else than offer her his hand," replied the old general evasively.

"Vedremo!" muttered Sterzl. He looked at his watch. "Half-past nine!" he exclaimed, "the thing grows more and more inexplicable. I will go round again to Palazzo Venezia. His jäger may know at any rate where he is, and when he is expected back. I beg of you, general, to await me here." Then in a low voice, he added, "and prevent my mother from going to Zinka. The child is

not fit for such agitation," and he hurried away.

A half an hour later he returned.

"Well?" asked the general.

"He drove off with the prince, Siegburg, and the Jatinskys an hour ago to Frascati's," said Sterzl, wearily. "On my asking his jäger if he was expected back this evening, the answer was 'Yes, certainly, for the count leaves Rome at eleven to-morrow morning with his highness.' Yes; he has put off declaring his engagement for fear of a scene with his brother—he leaves Rome for fear of a scene with me. *High Life* lay open upon his table!"

They heard the rustle of a dress; and looked round. Behind them stood Zinka, with hair disheveled, and horror-stricken eyes, glazed with weeping.

"Zinka!" cried Sterzl, rushing to her. Her eyes grew fixed, she staggered, and fell senseless in his arms. Pressing her fair head caressingly to his shoulder, he carried her out of the room.

CHAPTER IX.

SEMPALY possessed an excessively nervous organization, and highly sensitive ear, and, in consequence, cherished the most utter detestation of anything approaching a scene, in which agitation and high words were inevitable. Added to which he had the spoiled child's habit of ever putting off disagreeables as far as possible, in the hope that some *Deus ex machina* would eventually make all smooth.

His affection for Zinka was real; indeed, tender and passionate. Far from decreasing, it had rather increased within the last three days. If the dreamy and innocent moonlight scene with him had temporarily stilled Zinka's yearning, it had, on the contrary, only served to heighten his; if his timid, shifting mode of procedure had lowered him in Zinka's eyes, her simple proud bearing toward him had more than ever enhanced her charms for him. He was enduring tortures; yet did not suffer his state of mind to hinder him from calmly letting his good-natured elder brother settle his enor-

mous debts; or even, in order to propitiate this same noble, generous-hearted brother, from continuing, presumably, to pay attention to his cousins.

It must be allowed in his favor that he did not do this last so much intentionally, as instinctively; because, being naturally of an amiable disposition, he could not refrain from doing his utmost to create a pleasant atmosphere about him, even were it at the cost of his conscience. Had he been able to get a talk with Zinka during those three days, perhaps things might have resulted very differently. With his charm of manner he would probably have found it easy to reconquer his lost ground; and she possibly might, with her proud sense of honor, have influenced him to act differently. But he could not disturb Zinka at the bedside of her little friend; and to enter upon a cold-blooded explanation with Sterzl was not tempting. So he suffered hour after hour to go by, until on Friday morning the ill-starred newspaper was brought to him in Palazzo Venezia, addressed in a disguised handwriting. It threw him into the greatest agitation. He was just about to tear round to the Palazetto, when he remembered that his brother was to come at one o'clock to fetch him to Frascati's. He had dipped his pen in the ink to begin a note of

excuse to the Hotel de Londres, when there was a knock at his door, and a full half hour before the appointed time his brother came in, accompanied by his two cousins.

"What an unexpected surprise! What an honor!" exclaimed Sempaly, confused.

"So we meant it to be," laughed Polyxena. "Humph! rather a strong smell of Turkish tobacco, but the ensemble is good."

Meanwhile Nini was looking round with her shy, gazelle-like eyes. A bachelor's quarters belong to the mysteries which greatly exercise a young maiden's curiosity.

"The girls insisted upon coming up to see your den," cried the prince merrily; "so, *nolens volens*, I had to bring them, while Siegburg is doing the amiable to their mamma downstairs."

"You proposed it yourself, Oscar!" cried Nini, while Sempaly, with a deep bow, said gallantly, "From this moment these rooms are consecrated."

High Life was lying upon his writing-table; an iron hand was pressing upon his heart. Had his brother only come up alone . . . but with the two girls! . . . The situation was most unlucky.

Xena now began with teasing audacity looking round among his curiosities, opening his

books; and, laughingly approaching his writing-table, was about to take up *High Life*.

"*Halte là!*" cried Sempaly, "that is not for you, Xena."

"*Non toccare*," said the prince, with a good-humored laugh. "It is not the thing for so young a lady as you to examine too closely into the mysteries of a bachelor's den. One might take up a scorpion before one was aware. Moreover, we must not keep mamma waiting any longer, children. Get ready, Nicki."

Sempaly thought at first of some subterfuge; then it occurred to him that it really was not worth while to embitter Oscar's last few hours in Rome, that the matter could be arranged otherwise; and begging his brother to give him a few moments' grace, did in fact scribble off a short note to Sterzl, in which he formally asked Zinka's hand. This note he gave to the concièrge as he went downstairs, with instructions to take it up to the Secretary's Department. At first he felt quite satisfied with himself; but the more the afternoon proceeded the more painful grew his uneasiness, caused principally by the kindly glances directed by his brother to himself and Nini. More and more he felt as if he were being pressed into a *cul de sac*. In Villa Aldobrandini he attempted a last precau-

tion. Suddenly finding himself standing alone with Nini by the great fountain, a circumstance doubtless attributable to the amiable desire of the rest of the party that the young couple should have opportunity of a quiet talk with each other, he seized this favorable opportunity to unburden his heart. Calling her "his sister," he confessed to her his secret betrothal, and implored her friendship for his bride. Nini, who felt as if a dagger had been plunged into her heart, preserved a brave exterior, and endeavored, like every true woman, from fear of betraying her own feelings, to accord his betrothal an approbation she could not truthfully feel.

He kissed her hand warmly, and did not leave her side for the rest of the day. The prince, who had observed this secret conference between the young couple, smiled knowingly as he confided his suspicions to the Countess Jatinsky.

An affectionate, noble-hearted nature himself, open and clear as the day, he could not conceive what a young man should have to confide at once so secretly and tenderly to a young and lovely girl, if not the avowal of his love for her.

The day was drawing to a close. With the imprudence common to strangers in Rome,

they left it very late before they started on the homeward drive, not reaching their hotel until nearly ten o'clock.

Here the Nemesis awaited Sempaly.

At the end of supper, which had been served to the little party in Countess Jatinsky's apartments, and during which the secret confidences between Sempaly and his cousin had been ever increasing, the prince, rising with a smile, which betrayed the most intense pride in his clever powers of observation, seized his glass, crying:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I beg to give you the health of our betrothed couple!"

Nini turned crimson; Sempaly very white. He had reached the end of his *cul de sac*. Driven against the wall, nothing remained to him but to turn and face the enemies he could no longer escape. A sudden wild impulse seized him with his own hands to tear the loathsome mask from his face.

"What betrothed couple do you mean?" he asked.

"Come, come, don't be so mysterious, Nicki!" exclaimed the prince, affectionately. "Of you and—" One glance at Countess Nini silenced him.

"Of myself and Fräulein Zinka Sterzl!" cried Sempaly fiercely and emphatically.

The blood rushed to Prince Sempaly's head. For a moment, in his dismayed indignation, he lost all power of speech.

Countess Jatinsky gave a shocked smile; Polyxena curled her lips contemptuously; Nini, holding out her hand to the good-for-nothing, said, encouragingly:

"Your betrothed shall always find a friend in me."

But now the wrath of the prince broke forth. He raved; he swore that he would never give his consent to this ill-advised match; could not conceive how his brother, arrived at man's estate, could have got such a piece of boyish folly into his head.

The ladies discreetly retired.

Sempaly, whose previously undecided, wavering temperament had suddenly changed into a kind of cold audacity, ordered the waiter to bring in the fatal copy of *High Life*. The prince, having read the scandalous article to the end, exclaimed:

"The world must have come to a pretty pass if every man who has been tempted to commit imprudences with a pretty adventuress must needs pay the penalty of marrying her!"

At the insulting epithet applied to Zinka, Sempaly's tongue was unloosed. He did not spare himself. With most open frankness and

ready eloquence did he plead Zinka's cause. Selfish, nervous, physically and morally effeminate as he was, he was totally exempt from any kind of meanness. Now he could not sufficiently condemn himself; it seemed to him as if by the invectives he heaped upon himself he might be able to undo the evil he had wrought in the last few days. He made a clean breast of it. How he had loved Zinka from the first moment he had seen her; how he had been on the very point of declaring his affection for her when accident intervened at the critical moment to check his enthusiasm; told how he had neglected her, how he had sought by constant intercourse with his pretty cousins to raise a barrier between Zinka and the impulse of his heart; how he had unexpectedly met her again at Villa Brancaleone; and how, as, raising her from her fall he held her in his arms, passion, like an evil spirit, had come over him. He told all—all up to the moment that her head had sunk upon his shoulder. "Before such innocence a man can but bend the knee," he concluded, "and that what I have told you of her is not exaggerated, all Rome will vouch! Ask whom you like, Marie Vulpini, Truyn, the Ilsenberghs, even—Siegburg here!"

The prince turned to the latter.

"I do not quite see my way in this matter,"

he said. "Is what he says of the girl true, or is he romancing?"

Siegburg's answer was simple, warm and clear. It is no easy thing for a young man to praise a girl without doing her more harm than good. The witness he bore to Zinka was a masterpiece of tact and discretion, of quiet, enthusiastic esteem.

The prince's face clouded more and more.

"The young lady in question is then the one we recently met in the Piazza?" he said.

"Yes," returned Sempaly.

"Sister to the secretary of legation, whom the embassador presented to me yesterday, and niece of my old colonel?"

"Yes."

"After what you both tell me, not alone a lady of irreproachable character, but also much beloved?"

"Yes."

The prince was silent for an instant, wrestling with every fiber in his body for the traditions of caste in which he was born and had been bred. A union between a Fraulein Sterzl and a Sempaly was simply an enormity to him. He possessed in the highest degree that reverence for tradition called by the Count d'Alton-Shee "*le respect des ruines*"; but then they

must be noble ruins, or else they did not impress him.

His head resting on his hand, he still sat by the disordered supper-table, upon which the light was sparkling in the half emptied champagne glasses, and falling on the bouquets provided for the ladies, and left by them in their abrupt departure. Suddenly raising his head, and pointing to *High Life*, he asked:

"You had already read this article when we came to you in Palazzo Venezia this morning?"

"Yes."

The prince drew himself up. "And you did not remain in Rome to defend the lady?"

His great black eyes looked full into his brother's blue ones. "You could drive out with us—could leave the reputation of this girl a prey to all the scandal-mongers of Rome, because you feared to come to the unpleasantness of an explanation—because you feared a few angry words from me? You have behaved scandalously in this matter from first to last, sir, toward that young lady, and toward our poor angel in there," pointing to the door, through which the two young countesses and their mother had disappeared. "Of course I shall not leave you to starve. Your income will be paid to you as heretofore. For

the rest, all is over between us. We do not understand one another, you and I. Go!"

CHAPTER X.

THE expected *Deus et machina* had not put in an appearance.

The dreaded scene between the brothers, if delayed for a few hours, had broken out at last, and Sempaly, by his procrastinating, double-faced conduct, had managed not simply to excite his brother's wrath, but, more than that, his disdain; while his projected marriage with Zinka, when at last he had found himself compelled to confess his engagement to his brother, from the heights of a romantic love marriage—a kind of erotic paladinism—had sunk into that most commonplace of unions—a *mariage de conscience*.

Full of recollections of the unhappy scene, every nerve in him aching from the sleepless night that followed upon it; weary of tossing about on his pillow without being able to close an eye, Sempaly rose earlier than usual next

morning. Disgusted with himself, touched and surprised at his brother's proud magnanimity, thoroughly ashamed at the thought of the calumny to which he had subjected Zinka through his hesitating silence, he was in that intolerable state of overexcitement in which one is ready to lay upon the first person one meets the blame for one's own wrong-doing—to make the first comer suffer the pain one's self is enduring.

He was pacing up and down his sitting-room, part drawing, part smoking-room, waiting for his breakfast, when the general came in.

For the first time in his life, he had not a pleasant word for his old friend. "Good-morning!" he cried. "To what am I indebted for the pleasure of this early visit?"

"Upon my word!" exclaimed the choleric old gentleman, with difficulty repressing his anger, "you will hardly wonder that as Zinka's old friend and godfather I have come to ask you the reason of your extraordinary conduct!"

"It seems to me that that is rather a matter to concern Sterzl," returned Sempaly roughly.

"It happens that it is with a view to prevent a hostile encounter between you and Sterzl that I have taken upon myself to come to you,"

replied the general, who was certainly more of a cavalry officer than a diplomatist. "Sterzl is furious; and as I know your intentions toward Zinka to be honorable—" Here the old general's eyes lighted upon a Gladstone bag, such as young men of fashion use for short journeys, lying ready packed upon a divan. "You are going out of town?" he asked, in astonishment.

"I was intending to accompany my brother to Ostia this morning, returning to-morrow; but nothing will come of it now. I have fallen out with him—my good noble-hearted brother. He has cast me off forever. Does that satisfy you? With a stamp of the foot.

"And pray, am I to blame for the conduct which has brought about this rupture?" returned the general, violently.

There was a sharp tap at the door; and to Sempaly's curt "*Avanti!*" Sterzl entered. Without taking Sempaly's carelessly outstretched hand, he drew a newspaper from his pocket, spread it out before Sempaly, and asked bluntly:

"Have you read this article?"

"Yes," muttered Sempaly savagely between his teeth.

"Yesterday—before you started?" continued Sterzl.

This almost word-for-word repetition of his brother's questioning aroused in Sempaly the unpleasant and humiliating recollections of the events of the night before.

His eyes flashing angrily, he remained silent.

Sterzl could contain himself no longer. All the bitterness he had endured in the past six weeks rushed over him; suddenly his eyes, too, fell upon the unlucky traveling bag, and he lost the last remnant of his self-control.

What followed?

Like lightning something flashed past the general; unexpected, irrevocable, Sterzl taking a step forward, had flung the calumniating paper full in Sempaly's face. At that moment Sempaly's man entered with his breakfast tray. A few minutes later Sterzl and the general, in death-like silence, and not looking at one another, descended the stone staircase of Palazzo Venezia.

Once in the piazza the young diplomatist paused for a second, and drew a deep breath.

"Sempaly will send his seconds round to me in the course of the morning. May I request you to represent me, general?"

The general nodded silent assent.

"I will let Crespigny know, too," he continued, "then act as you both think best."

The general made no reply. His silence irritated Sterzl.

"By Heavens! I could bear it no longer," he murmured feverishly. "You think I was too violent—"

They had reached the Corso. Siegburg strolled up to them, gay, *insouciant* as ever, his hat carelessly set on the back of his head.

"Glad to be the first to congratulate you, Sterzl!" he cried.

"Upon what?" returned Sterzl.

"Why, upon your sister's betrothal to Sempaly. Do you mean to say you have not yet heard of it?"

Sterzl could stand it no longer.

"What the devil are you talking of? I do not understand you," he stammered.

"What! you do not know?" said Siegburg. "Last night the cat was let out of the bag—Nicki announced his engagement to us. Oscar, to whom it was all new—but come along with me into this cafe, and I will tell you all about it. It's not well to be talking of such things in the open."

"I—I have no time," murmured Sterzl, with fixed, dulled eyes; and he strode hurriedly past Siegburg, staggering as he walked, and jostling against the passers-by.

"What's up?" said Siegburg, looking after

him. "I thought to give him pleasure, and, by Jove! One never seems to get to the bottom of folks. This betrothal will make a pretty stir in Vienna, eh, general? But I agree with it—perfectly agree with it. We stand upon the threshold of a new era—as Schiller—or who was it?—most likely Bismarck—said, and shall be able to tell our children that we have witnessed it. But what on earth is the matter with you two—you and Sterzl? Good Heavens! You just came out of Palazzo Venezia. Could Nicki and Sterzl, through some misunderstanding, have—"

The general dryly assented.

"Oh, never fear, that will all be settled amicably!" exclaimed Siegburg, consolingly.

CHAPTER XI.

On Sterzl's return to the Palazetto, he found Sempaly's before-mentioned letter awaiting him. The concierge, according to the count's instructions, had taken it to the secretarial department. As Sterzl, however, had not been there at all the previous day, it had remained unopened, and had only been brought round to the Palazetto by one of the embassy messengers that morning.

After reading it, Sterzl covered his face with his hands.

A little later Sempaly's two seconds, Siegburg and the Russian military attaché, presented themselves.

No; no amicable settlement was possible. The *point d'honneur*, under the circumstances, allowed of no friendly intervention. What is this *point d'honneur?* A social conventionality belonging to the fashionable world — the religion of chivalry!

Sterzl was due to start that night by the

eleven o'clock express for Vienna on diplomatic affairs, before his final departure for Constantinople. The duel therefore must come off that very day. With the exception of appointing the time, Sterzl left all arrangements to his two seconds, Klinger and Crespigny.

Swords — seven o'clock at the church ruins, opposite the Metella Memorial, was agreed upon. A little after six the three men, Sterzl and his two seconds, set out. Through the close, dark streets leading to the Forum rolls the carriage, past the foot of the Palatine, skirting the Coliseum, through the Constantine Archway into the Via Appia, ever further between gray-green shimmering walls over which brown ruins and tall black cypresses are visible.

Now the walls disappear, thick green hedges overgrown with luxuriant creepers border the road on either side. With their heavy sickly smell, their wealth of poisonous orchid and asphodel blossoms, with which, like a delirious fever dream, each successive spring-time overspreads its monotonous barrenness, the Campagna opens its green carpet over the plain.

Sterzl sat silently facing his seconds, his back to the horses. He did not attempt to affect a careless demeanor. A truly courageous man may often face death with indifference,

never with levity. Death is ever a master, to whom reverence is due!

Something was weighing upon him. But his two companions, who knew, not only his character, but also the circumstances attending the duel, were well aware that this something was not anxiety about his own fate.

No. The misery brought about finally by his own unrestrained violence, by his want of self-command, was ever before him. That this betrothal, forced on by a series of surprises and accidents, could not possibly have resulted in a happy marriage, he did not consider. Sempaly's faults he had clean forgotten. One thing alone he knew; that his sister might have had the wish of her heart, and that *he*, and *he alone*, had been the one to rob her of it!

A wondrous scent exhaled from out the orchids, the blossoming hedges and the tender foliage of the trees, like the fair spirit of spring, bringing with it sweet memories of childhood to the silent, brooding man. He thought of the great neglected orchard in Alinkau; of a May morning he had spent there before he entered the Theresianum. The old apple-trees had donned their pinkest garb. Butterflies fluttered through the air, and the first forget-me-nots were peeping through the brambles on the bank of the stream that with sleepy mur-

mur, under stunted willows, ran through the orchard. The scent of earth, trees, flowers was like this of to-day; and Zinka, then a tiny baby tripping up to Cecil, had said, with important confidential air: "Do you know the good God has left the gate of heaven open again; that's why it all smells so sweet!"

She was wearing a little white pinafore, and had long golden hair, and held fast so lovingly to her big brother with her tender, helpless little fingers. And he, lifting her up in his arms, answered: "Yes, Zini, the good God has left heaven's gate open; and you have slipped out, my little angel!" Oh, the great puzzled eyes with which she looked at him!

She had ever been his darling. On his deathbed his dear father had committed her to his care. And now "Poor little butterfly!" he murmured half aloud.

"Do not be too considerate of your adversary," a deep, manly voice called out to him. It was Crespigny, who aroused him from his dreams of home and early days. "Do not be too considerate of him," he repeated. "You have everything in your favor; practice, skill, and muscular strength. But Sempaly—I know his art of fencing thoroughly—has one uncommonly dangerous peculiarity—you can never know what he's after."

Sterzl glanced back over his shoulder. Before him rose the Metella Memorial — their destination.

CHAPTER XII.

Opposite the Metella Memorial, in all its heathen grandeur and mediæval fortification, stands a half-ruined, entirely deserted, primitive Gothic church, the roof of which is formed by the blue sky above. A weatherbeaten cross let into the now crumbling stone work of the doorway points to the little church having belonged to the early Christian period. Opposite the entrance an arch, still in good preservation, shows where stood the altar. No vestige of the remains or bass-relief ornamentation of any kind is to be seen; only ferns, tender emerald-green maiden-hair, nestle at the foot of the gray old walls. The ground even, as if laid with a parquetrie floor, is covered with fine turf, from out which, in spring, peep thousands of crimson-tipped daisies, looking smilingly up to the blue sky above; faint-smelling nettles grow

rankly in the corners and along the foot of the walls.

The adversary's party were already there when Sterzl and his seconds arrived; Sempaly, chatting calmly, but without any pretense of levity, with the Russian military attaché, greeted the other side with grave courtesy. His bearing was perfect. With all his capricious versatility of character and nervous sensibility, he possessed at the right moment, and in no slight degree, that indomitable self-possession of the man of the world which enables him to look upon fighting a duel, when occasion requires, with the same imperturbability of spirit as that with which, at another time, he would raise his hat.

Seigburg alone seemed agitated; the others were composure itself.

The seconds made a careful examination that no one was watching their movements. A death-like stillness reigned. Recently devastated by fever, the Vigna, which stretched at the back of the church, was uninhabited. Formalities were hastily exchanged. Sempaly and Sterzl, removing their coats, took their places on the spots marked by their seconds.

The signal was given, and at the instant was heard the "click" of steel meeting steel.

Whoever has gone through the excitement of a slowly impending, inevitable danger, will recall how, when the dreaded climax has arrived, their nerve tension has suddenly relaxed, their agitation has ceased, their very dread has fled, and their whole mental attitude has been one of breathless concentrated curiosity.

So it was with Seigburg and the general, as they followed the duel with wellnigh impassive attention.

Sempaly had made the first thrust, and a sharp one. Sterzl kept studiously on the defensive. He had the German method of occasionally following up a thrust with his whole strength, which, with his otherwise great proficiency, gave him a terrible advantage over a physically weaker adversary. The knowledge of his superiority seemed at first to cripple him. From a purely technical point of view the duel was an unusually interesting one, Sempaly developing a marvelous, and, as Crespigny expressed it, unaccountable dexterity, met by Sterzl's iron calm. The latter was evidently reckoning upon tiring out his adversary, and then ending the duel by slightly wounding him. He gave Sempaly a cut in the shoulder; but Sempaly would not let the wound count; it was nothing, he declared.

After a short respite, the duel recommenced. Sempaly began to look pale and exhausted ; his movements became short, sharp and violent. Sterzl's face, on the contrary, grew more animated. Like every enthusiastic swordsman in a prolonged engagement, he had warmed to his work, and was now fighting as if in a fencing bout, without heeding the consequences of his thrusts.

The outlook was bad for Sempaly. Suddenly through the stillness rang out in the far distance in a boy's thin soprano :

"Vieni Maggio ; vieni primavera."

The thought flashed across Sterzl of that evening when Zinka had sung those words to Sempaly. The romance dormant in his nature awakened within him. He lost his head. Fearing to harm Sempaly, he forgot to defend himself, and, all at once awkward, as if he had never held sword in his hand, left himself utterly unguarded.

The seconds were about to step in. Too late !

With the scarce audible sound of sharp steel entering flesh, Sempaly's sword had penetrated his adversary's side. Sterzl's flannel shirt was instantaneously dyed with blood, his eyes be-

came fixed, his weapon fell from his hand, he made one, two steps forward, then fell unconscious to the ground.

The duel was over.

CHAPTER XIII.

A QUARTER of an hour later a temporary bandage had been applied, and in the now closed landau, the cushions arranged as comfortably as possible to form a couch for the wounded man, the general and the surgeon drove slowly back to Rome with their unconscious burden.

Twilight had descended over the Campagna. From time to time the general cast an anxious look to see how far they still were from the city. More and more lonely and melancholy grew the road. Once a cart filled with boisterous peasants from the Campagna rattled by them; a little farther on two white-clad monks with red flickering torches in their hands were standing at the porch of a church; after that the road was deserted. Pitch black towered the cypresses against the pale evening sky; over the Cam-

pagna spread a gray haze. They passed under the Constantine Arch. The horse's hoofs sounded noisily upon the paved roads.

Slowly — slowly.

The sleepy street lanterns of Rome flicker in the pale twilight. They have reached the Corso. It is the hour when, almost deserted by carriages, it is filled to overflowing with loungers. A garish light streams out from numberless cafés. The closed landau, going at such slow pace, attracts attention. Loungers draw together in groups to gaze and whisper after it. Reaching the Palazetto, they turn into the court-yard, the surgeon and general alight. The concierge comes out of his lodge; his dog, recognizing the general, jumps round him, barking.

"Quiet!" says the general, "quiet!"

Servants hurry down the steps; the women sob, once more the general, but in more commanding, impressive manner, orders "Silence, silence!" as though it were of importance that Zinka should remain in ignorance for yet another moment of the dread catastrophe.

With difficulty they bear the heavy body up the steps; their slow, stumbling tread echoing through the silence.

Suddenly they hear Zinka's anxious voice, then the baroness's angry reprimand; a door

is wrenched open, and Zinka rushes toward them.

A groaning, half stifled cry issues from her breast—the cry of one struggling to awaken from some evil dream!

Mournfully they signed the women away and carried him to his room. While they were still busying themselves about his bed, a footman ushered Dr. E——, the before named, eminent German physician, into the sick room. Sempaly, who, driving fast, had reached Rome a full hour sooner than the general with his wounded patient, having sent him. With consummate care the great physician examined the wound, adjusting the bandage with his well-known skill, wrote a prescription, and ordered ice applications. Then sympathetically pressing the hands of the two women so anxiously awaiting his verdict outside the door, assured them, with the benevolent, encouraging smile that had acquired him half his splendid practice, that the patient would pass a quiet night.

The smile, however, vanished as he turned to the general, accompanying him downstairs.

"Is the wound dangerous?" asked the old soldier, with beating heart.

Dr. E—— shook his head. "Are you a relative of the patient?" he asked.

"No; but a very old friend."

"The wound is mortal," said Dr. E——. "I may be mistaken—I may be mistaken. Nature sometimes does wonders, and the patient has a splendid constitution. What muscular development! I have seldom seen the like. But as far as human foresight goes, he is—" and he made a gesture, plainly denoting Sterzl's death warrant. "It is always a comfort to the survivors to know that all that is humanly possible has been done to ward off the catastrophe," he continued. "I will come early to-morrow morning to see how he goes on. Send the prescription to the chemist of the French embassy. He is the best. Good-night."

With these words he stepped into his carriage.

The general gave the prescription to the concierge. With Italian willingness and disregard for appearances the man rushed off without his hat to have it made up. As if it needed haste!

With painful effort of self-command the old soldier went back to the sick room. Zinka, pale and tearless, trembling with anxiety, stood, almost humbly, at the foot of the bed. The baroness, walking up and down, was sobbing, wringing her hands alternately, and pushing back the hair from her temples. She, of course,

besieged the general with questions upon the doctor's diagnosis. His evasive answers sufficed to fill her with unreasoning hope, and to reawaken in her the worldliness which fear for her son's life had for an instant dispelled.

"Yes, yes. He will have a quiet night," she whimpered. "It will all come right. It would be such a pity with his brilliant career; but all chance of Constantinople is at an end."

Zinka had grown still whiter at the general's words; but she remained silent.

That a duel had taken place, she, as well as her mother, had guessed. What conclusions did she draw? what was she thinking? what feeling? She was never able to tell. Her soul was a blank; her heart turned to ice; her whole being absorbed in one immeasurable feeling of terror.

By dint of long, earnest, skillful persuasion the general succeeded in inducing the baroness to leave her son's room and lie down for a little, "to husband her strength for the sick room."

Hardly had the door closed upon her than Sterzl's man, entering softly, announced Count Truyn.

At his name Zinka raised her head. The general hastened toward him.

"May I come in?" he asked.

Zinka nodded assent.

Told the news by Siegburg, Count Truyn had hastened off at this late hour to the Palazetto. Silently he went up to Zinka. The quiet, affectionate manner in which he held both her hands in his, without saying a word; the deep sympathy and intense grief at being powerless to help her that spoke in his eyes, warmed her to the heart. The numbness that had crept over her whole being began to yield. Tears rushed to her eyes, her lips trembled; then, with painful effort to restrain her sobs, she murmured, scarce intelligibly, "There is no hope! No hope!!"

His mother's unrestrained laments had not disturbed the dying man; the first half-stifled moan that escaped from Zinka's lips roused him. His limbs began to twitch uneasily, slowly he opened his large eyes, the whites of which shone dark as polished silver, and raised them to his sister's face. From her his glance fell wearily and haltingly upon a cloth stained with blood, which they had forgotten to remove, then upon the general. Slowly, painfully he seemed to be putting things together in his mind. He struggled for breath; made impatient gestures with hands and shoulders. Then a strong convulsive movement shook his whole body. Consciousness had returned; he drew a deep breath.

His first thought was of his official duties.

"Have you informed his excellency?" he asked the general, almost violently.

"No, not yet."

"Then lose no time, I pray you—a telegram must be sent to Vienna."

"All right—all right," returned the general soothingly. "I will see to it at once. Will you be so kind as to stay here until I come back?" he asked Truyn, as he hurried out.

For an instant noiseless silence prevailed; then Sterzl began in a low voice:

"Do you know how it happened, Count Truyn?"

Truyn bowed his head.

"And you, Zini!" asked Sterzl, raising his sad eyes to the girl's white face.

"I know that *you* are suffering," she made answer; "that is enough for me!"

"Oh, Zini!"

The wounded man, gasping for breath, stretched out his hand to his sister, and said in a hoarse, scarce intelligible voice, "Zini—Butterfly—it was all my fault—I have spoiled all your happiness—I alone."

She tried to restrain him. "Do not excite your dear self," she whispered, leaning lovingly over him. "Let it all rest until you are better. I know how you love me, and that

you would get me down the very stars from heaven if you could only reach them!"

A distressing agitation came over him.

"No, Zini, no. You might have had the stars," he uttered in a kind, hollow, breathless staccato, "the planets themselves — Sempaly was not in fault—I only—the prince had consented—but—I was mad — I forgot myself — and all was done for!— Give me a drop of water, Zini, I am parched—"

She gave him the water, he drank eagerly. Then, motioning away the hand with which she would have gently closed his lips, he continued excitedly, but in a weak voice: "I must tell you—or my heart will break. There in my secretary, count, in the little drawer to the left — there is a letter for Zinka — give it to her!"

Count Truyn did as he wished. The letter was sealed and addressed in Sterzl's distinct handwriting to his sister. She broke open the envelope. It contained the letter written by Sempaly before his expedition to Frascati. Sterzl had added a few explanatory words in case it should fall into Zinka's hands after his death. Anxiously the dying man watched the expression of her face as she read; it did not change in the slightest degree. Sempaly's words glided over her heart without for an in-

stant touching it. After reading it she was silent, two red spots burning upon her white cheeks.

"I received—that letter—too late," said Sterzl despairingly. "The general—will tell you—how it all—came about. I lost my head, but I—was careful to spare him! So forgive, Zini—and act—as if I had—never been. Then I shall rest—quietly in my grave—when I know—that you are happy!"

She was still silent; her eyes had grown dark. But it was not grief for her lost happiness that glowed in them. Suddenly she tore the letter in two, and let the pieces fall to the ground:

"Had he written ten letters," she said, "it would have made no difference. Do not vex your dear self, Cecil. It is past! Had there never been any obstacle between him and me I could not be his wife now. I love him no longer. He seems to me so poor and mean-spirited compared with you!"

CHAPTER XIV.

ALL discord was over between brother and sister; their differences were healed.

For another four-and-twenty hours he wrestled with death, Zinka never leaving his side. The consciousness of their mutual devotion seemed to blend a mournful comfort with the great pain of their parting. The physical suffering he endured was terrible, especially during the first night and the following morning. Yet he bore his intense suffering with the greatest heroism; only from the slight twitching of his hands or the involuntary contortion of his features could they even be guessed at. Nearly the whole time he retained his consciousness.

He refused to take Dr. E——'s soothing opiates. He wanted to "keep his head" as long as possible.

When Zinka, with tenderest circumlocution, entreated him to take the last sacrament he yielded to her wish.

"If it comforts you, Butterfly," he whispered, scarce audibly; and received the priest

with due reverence and perfect self-control. In the afternoon he was somewhat easier. Zinka began to feel a shade of hope.

"You are better," she asked imploringly, "you are better, are you not?"

"I am in much less pain," he replied.

Then she began to make plans for the future. He smiled sadly.

It was impossible for a man to die more nobly. And death was hard to him!

The expressions of sympathy at the sad fate which had befallen him were general. Like wildfire the news of the terrible catastrophe had spread through the whole city. Society was seized with a species of panic. That day there was not a person who had allowed him or herself to speak a light word against Sterzl or his sister, who did not bitterly repent it. Not a person who did not come individually, or send, to make inquiries at the Palazetto.

From time to time the baroness would triumphantly bring a visiting card, turned down at the corners, to the sick bed and say, "So-and-so has just called personally to inquire after you."

In the late afternoon he sank into an uneasy slumber. Zinka and the general did not stir from his bedside. The windows were open, yet the air which came in through the Venetian

blinds was close and oppressive. Straw was laid down before the house; the roll of carriage wheels in the Corso came up with subdued, deadened sound to the dying man's room. Twilight had set in; the sound of wheels had ceased.

Suddenly the slow, uneven footsteps of a great throng of people, accompanied by the sound of many voices chanting a dismal, horror-inspiring dirge broke upon the evening stillness.

Zinka sprang up to close the windows. Too late! The sick man, wearily opening his eyes, had heard it: "A funeral!" he murmured.

From that time he became more restless. The agony of his wound began to torment him afresh. He clutched at the sheets; tossed his head from side to side incessantly; spoke about his will, begging the general to note certain slight alterations he wanted made in it; and on Zinka's imploring: "Not now, darling. Leave it for another time," he shook his head, murmuring with faint voice, inaudible from pain, "I am in haste — in haste — railway fever."

Then, as Zinka, unable longer to repress her tears, was hastening out to hide them, he held her back:

"Stay here, old lady — stay, Zini," he said. "Cry, darling, if it eases your heart — cry, my precious! Poor little butterfly! you will miss me a little, after all!"

Once only did his composure quite forsake him. He had entreated them to send to Palazzo Venezia for an English newspaper containing intelligence upon a political question that was greatly interesting him.

His excellency brought round the paper himself; and, greatly grieved, went to his bedside.

"How are you—how are you, my dear fellow? You were right, Sterzl. Ignatieff has positively—Astonishing what power of far-seeing you have. I shall miss you tremendously when you go to Constanti—." He could say no more. A painful pause ensued.

"It is a longer journey than to Constantinople," murmured Sterzl, at length. "I wonder who will fill my place?" His voice failed him, and he buried his face, with a groan, in his pillows.

Toward midnight the death agony began. Dr. E—— had warned the general that it would be terrible. In vain they endeavored to persuade Zinka to leave the room. In vain! The whole night long she knelt by the dying man's bedside, praying.

At five in the morning the rattling in the throat ceased. It seemed as though all was over. Then, suddenly, the dying man began to utter a few disconnected words. In his eyes

was to be seen the far-away look to be seen in those of the dying.

"Do not cry, dear child," he breathed. "All will yet be well." Then with effort, feeling about with his hands, as though searching for the thought his brain could no longer retain, his eyes turned for a last time on his sister. "Go, lie down and rest, Zini," he uttered, inaudibly. "I am better—am sleepy—Constantino—"

He turned his face to the wall, drew a long deep breath, and it was over. He had entered upon his journey.

The general closed his eyes, and led Zinka away.

Out in the corridor stood a bowed figure. It was Sempaly.

Tormented by grief and repentance he had stolen into the Palazetto; and stood there, pale and troubled, with trembling hands and staring eyes.

She did not shrink away from him; she passed him by. She did not even see him!

The glorious light of a Southern morning lay warm and golden upon the courtyard and its colonnades. In a dark corner, whose shade was black in contrast with the surrounding brilliancy, fluttered a host of bright blue but-

terflies, like a strip of azure sky torn into a thousand shreds.

It was the corner where the figure of the Amazon stood !

CHAPTER XV.

THANKS to Siegburg's, as ever, thoughtful indiscretion, all Rome quickly was in possession of the fact that Prince Sempaly, the night before the duel, had given his consent to his brother's marriage with Fraulein Sterzl. They knew too of Sterzl's outbreak of rage; and of his atonement, out of all proportion to his fault. Princess Vulpini's steady friendship for Zinka, which never for one instant flagged, had stopped evil tongues and saved her reputation. There was a tremendous rebound in favor of the Sterzls throughout society. It became bad taste, little minded, even *mauvais genre*, to throw suspicion upon Zinka. Both she and her brother were now considered *des gens tout a fait exceptionnels !*

The dead man had desired to be buried in his

native country. His body was embalmed, and lay in state in a vast, empty apartment in which the baroness at one time had intended to give a ball. Flowers bedecked the walls, the floor and the coffin. It was a perfect Roman *infiorata*. The windows were darkened with heavy hangings; the soft, reddish flame of hundreds of immense wax candles flickered in the vast apartment.

Countess Ilsenbergh and the Jatinskys were present at the consecration. Quite a crush of the most distinguished members of Roman society, attired in mourning, gathered round the bier. Never had one of the baroness's "at homes" been so frequented. One could read in her silly little face the ill-placed exultation she was experiencing, as she stood by her son's coffin clad in a dress of soft, flowing material, heavily trimmed with crape, two effective tears stealing down her cheeks, a black-bordered handkerchief in her hand, and—received.

People pressed her hand, uttering words of sympathy, and she whispered, "This does me good."

Then, having settled the mother, they looked round for the sister, feeling that they would gladly show, at least, how sincerely they were sympathizing in her great sorrow. At first they could see her nowhere; when, at last, one

of the ladies whispered, half-frightened, "There she is," and all eyes turned to the dark corner where Princess Vulpini was bending with unaffected motherly solicitude over the poor white, quivering, utterly prostrate girl; but none had the courage to approach her. Only Countess Nini, who looked almost as wretched as Zinka herself, going up to her, put her arms about her and kissed her.

Next morning mass was read in San Marco, close by the Embassy Palace. A quartet of men's voices singing the sweet touching Allegretto from the Seventh Symphony, that but three short months before had been sung at the Lady Jane Grey tableau.

A week later Baroness Sterzl and her daughter left Rome. Up to the last the baroness received visits of condolence, never failing to repeat to each comer her monotonous formula of grief, "a career of such brilliant promise!"

Zinka never appeared in the drawing-room, and but few ventured to seek her in her little boudoir. Worn to a shadow, with sharpened features and eyes dim with weeping, she looked most piteous; seeming, after the violence of her first grief had passed away, to become more and more inconsolable. So it is with all deep natures.

In the first stage of mourning for our dead there is always a kind of rebellion against fate — a bewilderment in which we end by being oblivious of everything, even the cause of our tears. It is when our eyes have wept themselves dry, our hearts have exhausted themselves with struggling — when, for the first time, we begin to say, "resign yourself," that we see the awful void that death has created in our lives, and we feel how empty, still and cold existence has become for us.

Daily the sense of what she had lost grew upon Zinka. It seemed as if she were ever stretching out into space for the strong arm which had supported her so lovingly. The general and Princess Vulpini did their very best to help her through this trying time. The one who did her most good was Truyn; and sometimes, toward evening, when she could feel sure that she would meet no one about in the streets, she would slip round to Gabrielle in the Hotel de l'Europe, and it was touching to see how tenderly the child understood her elder friend's sorrow; how loving was her sympathy.

On the morning of their departure Count Truyn and the general were at the station. Truyn got into the carriage to open or shut a window the maid could not manage. When he

had arranged it to his satisfaction, Zinka put both hands in his:

"God reward you for your goodness," she said, and raised her thin face as if for a kiss. Hesitating for an instant, he made the sign of the cross upon her forehead, then gently pressed her fair hair with his lips.

"Till we next meet!" he murmured huskily; and bowing once more to the baroness, left the carriage.

When he stepped on to the platform his face was flushed, his eyes brilliant. Bareheaded he stood looking after the departing train, from which a thin, pale face was looking its farewells.

"If one had but the right to care for her!" he murmured.

CHAPTER XVI.

And now a few farewell words. Baroness Sterzl was one of the rare people who possess not a single redeeming point. In her Moravian estate, to which she had retired, she was in-

tensely bored and treated Zinka with most unloving hardness. Thoroughly discontented and embittered, she complained from morning till night, making every one who came near her unhappy with her sour face. After the year of mourning had expired, she felt a wish for change. She would rush off to the Baths or Vienna, where she collected the wreck of her old circles about her, endeavoring to create envy and astonishment in the minds of her acquaintances by reminiscences of her stay in Rome. She still wore a great deal of crape upon her dresses, and made use of black bordered note paper; spoke incessantly of being broken-hearted at her son's loss, and did her best to give herself a sort of Niobe-Nimbus, although, in reality, her outward grief was but a last pedestal to her vanity.

The grim old artist-general always maintained that she was in reality as proud as possible that her son had been killed by 'a Sempaly.' She died some three years after the catastrophe from inflammation of the lungs, which she aggravated by insisting upon accompanying a friend, on a bitterly cold April day, to the Washing of Feet at the *Sacré Cœur*. Zinka mourned the loss of her mother more deeply than might have been expected.

She passed summer and winter, year after

year, in Alinkau; where Gabrielle Truyn, with her English governess, often came to stay with her for a few weeks at a time. Count Truyn rarely came; and when he did it was only to stay a few hours. But the sacrifice he made in thus parting with his little comrade for her sake was only to be appreciated by one who knew his utter devotion to his child.

With Princess Vulpini Zinka continued to keep up an affectionate correspondence. Her grief abated very, very slowly. But, as with all noble natures, it seemed to have a wonderfully refining and purifying effect upon her. She devoted her life to works of self-denying benevolence. The one happiness left to her in those sad years was the alleviation of the sorrows of others.

Shortly after the death of Baroness Sterzl, General Klinger left Europe. He did not return before the spring of last year, when he disembarked at Havre-de-Grace, in order to give himself a few days in Paris, on his way back to Rome.

Thanks to the kind offices of an artist friend, he found himself privileged to visit the Salon on varnishing day—the day before the opening.

Among the many fashionable young ladies who, under the ægis of their professor, or an

artist friend, have contrived to obtain admission to the much-sought-after private view, he was struck by the unusual loveliness of a young girl, who, with head erect, and light elastic tread, was hurrying from picture to picture, with the uncompromising critical judgment of an unfledged, but fanatical, novice in art.

There was something so distinguished in her charming appearance, so exasperating in her naïve arrogance, so childishly confidential in the manner with which she addressed the elderly man, one of the most renowned artists of Paris, who seemed to be conducting her through the labyrinth of art, that the old officer could not resist gazing at her with kindly admiration. Suddenly catching sight of him, she looked at him attentively, then coming up, with most bewitching frankness said :

"Oh, general, when did you come back? How delighted papa will be! Why, you have not altered the tiniest bit—"

"That I cannot say for you, Countess Gabrielle!" he rejoined.

"No, I suppose not! When did we last meet? Four years ago at Zini's, was it not? I was quite a child then," she chattered on. "Now I am grown up; and, moreover—only

think, general, I am an exhibitor. Just a little water-color sketch," she added, with a slight blush, which made her the image of her father. "You will come and see my small picture, won't you?"

"Of course," he said. Then, his eyes falling on her dress, "You seem to be in mourning."

"Yes," she replied, "half-mourning for poor mamma. It is nearly a year since she died." A momentary gravity passed over her face. "Ah, there is papa," she exclaimed, quickly recovering her spirits. "We are always losing each other in the Salon. We have such opposite tastes, do you know? Papa is still quite one of the old school."

Count Truyn cordially greeted the general. Gabrielle's eyes glanced with amusement from one to the other, the most roguish of dimples playing on her cheeks. Finally, going close up to her father, she whispered something to him in a very low voice. At first he seemed to hesitate, then said, not without a shade of embarrassment.

"We are driving now to the Hotel Bristol, where we are to breakfast with my sister. I am sure it will give her the greatest pleasure if you will accompany us."

The general made a few demurs about "intrusion," etc., but finally yielded to Gabrielle's

soft persuasion, and soon found himself driving through the flowery enchantment, enhanced by recent rain, of the Champs Elysées to the Place Vendôme.

"Auntie," cried Gabrielle, merrilly, as she entered the drawing-room. "Guess whom we are bringing you?"

"Ah!" exclaimed the princess warmly. "It is you, general; just the person we most desired to see."

Suddenly his eyes glanced from her. There, a little behind her, stood Zinka.

The impress of a great sorrow had left its indelible mark upon her countenance; yet there was the light of an abiding, intense happiness in her eyes which harmonized well with the memory of former sorrow.

The sweet Maytime of her life had faded; but there was that in her whole appearance of such tender charm that even Gabrielle's freshness of happy eighteen could in no way detract from it.

Count Truyn advanced toward her—an embarrassed silence ensued. Suddenly Gabrielle broke into a peal of merry laughter.

"Can you not guess, general?" she cried.

"It is not yet made public," stammered Truyn; "but you have always taken so warm an interest," taking Zinka's hand in his.

The general's face beamed with delight. Clasping Zinka in his arms, he held out one hand to Truyn in hearty congratulation.

But she, bursting into a flood of tears, whispered: "Oh, uncle, if Cecil had but lived to see it!"

And Sempaly?

After the terrible event he disappeared from the scene, traveled for a time in the East, then returned to his old career.

To a Sempaly all is possible!

He is now looked upon as one of our most gifted diplomatists. A singular change has come over him. From being one of the most idle and favorite of loungers among attachés, he has become a rigid official. In exterior, too, he is changed. He is more *distingué* in appearance even than formerly; but his features are sharper. He is irritable, haughty, inconsiderate in speech, never failing to give utterance to the bitter things that lie uppermost with him — to men as to women. Yet, and perhaps even more now than formerly, he exercises an insuperable charm over all who come in contact with him. Not long since, as the general was waiting at one of the Hungarian border stations for his train to Vienna, he was struck by the musical voice of a fellow traveler, who, wrapped

in a coat of otter fur, his traveling cap pushed well down on his forehead, was giving some curt instructions to his man servant. The old officer looked up, his eyes met those of the stranger—it was Sempaly, on his way back to Vienna from the East. They entered into conversation, but somewhat coldly. All at once Sempaly, with a *brusquerie* already familiarized as his throughout the civilized world, began, "You were in Paris at the time — witness to the wedding. What do you think of Truyn's marriage?"

"I am delighted at it," returned the general.

"Well, yes. Every one seems rejoicing. Marie Vulpini is charmed; and Gabrielle was chief bridesmaid, they wrote me. '*Enfin tout est pour le mieux dans le meilleur des mondes possibles,*'" he quoted in his sharp, abrupt manner. "And Zinka — how is she looking?—the papers said she looked lovely."

"She is still very charming," said the general, with the absent-minded garrulity of old age. "Moreover, happiness is a wondrous beautifier. Her one regret is that Cecil did not live to see it all!"

Even as he said the words, the terrible want of tact of which he had been guilty staggered him; and to turn the conversation to neutral ground he began hurriedly alluding to Sempaly's remarkably rapid success in his diplo-

matic career; adding that it must be a source of gratification to him to have found such a congenial sphere for his brilliant abilities.

Sempaly looked scrutinizingly at him and gave a strange smile.

"It is an odd thing, general," he rejoined, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Youth exacts happiness from Fate as a right. In one's riper years one prays for peace as an alms! It is easier to obtain that which one exacts than that which one prays for, but—one does not hold it fast."

THE END.

HOSPITAL SATURDAY.

By Lily E. F. Barry.

It was Hospital Saturday at Bootle.

There are just two or three facts about Bootle which a stranger picks up or has rubbed into him after an hour's residence in the place. The first is that Bootle is dirty; the second that it has famous docks—a continuation of the great Liverpool docks—from which you get a fine view down the Mersey looking seaward; and whither, the Bootleites tell you proudly, Turner used to come to see the sun set; and the third is that Bootle has got a hospital.

On the whole, the last-named feature is, from certain points of view, the most impor-

tant in the make-up of the town; say, for instance, as an inexhaustible topic of conversation among resident ladies with a turn for philanthropy; or again, and more particularly, as the nucleus of many delightful and novel entertainments, in which young people of both sexes figure prominently and advance prodigiously toward those pleasant little mutual understandings which frequently lead up to "happy events."

The institution of Hospital Saturday, which, like Christmas, comes but once a year, is only one of the ingenious traps set for unwary purse owners by the plotting spirits of the ladies previously alluded to, whose deep interest in the maintenance of the revered institution constantly urges them to develop new schemes for swelling its revenues. The plan of campaign is simple enough. Very early on the morning of the appointed day there appears in every public place, and at various street corners in the most frequented thoroughfares, a small group of enthusiastic workers, surrounding a gayly decorated cot — or semblance of one — which serves as a receptacle for the offerings of the passers-by. Each helper in the good work is provided with a tiny basket, having bright-colored ribbons twisted round the handle, and is authorized by this

token of her office to accost all chance pedestrians with the modest request:

"Will you give something for the Hospital, please?"

The effect is inspiring as well as picturesque, and more than one heart that is callous to ordinary appeals melts suddenly at the suggestive sight of the little white cot guarded by a sweet-faced girl, and a shilling, or ten shillings, nay, even a shining sovereign, thus finds its way into the temporary treasury of the Hospital.

On the particular Hospital Saturday when my story opens, Bootle was more than ever "dirty Bootle." It had rained all night, and the paved streets and crossings glistened with oily mud. The weather was still unsettled, a gray sky hanging over the dull houses, and occasionally venting its sullen humor in a dispiriting drip of rain.

But the young hospital workers, though not perhaps as smartly dressed as they might have been if the sky had shone fair, had made pretty successful compromise in the matter of toilets, and looked on the whole not uncheerful planted in their various stations, from which numerous little excursions had to be made in different directions to intercept comers whose way lay not straight in the line of the cot.

Near the vaulted entrance to the Great Western Railway depot a knot of workers had taken up their stand. It was a favorable situation, being protected from the weather, and in the way of an ever-changing crowd, filing to and from the local trains that came and went every few minutes. Mrs. Allan, who presided over this cot, had no grounds for complaint, for even in their haste few travelers passed in or out of the depot without throwing a shilling or a sixpence on the fast increasing pile. But even this did not satisfy her zealous acquisitiveness. Seeing that many people were passing at a point on the street just below the station, she coveted their pence.

"If one of you would stand over at that corner," she suggested to her assistants, who, in an interval of waiting, stood grouped around her. "I believe it would pay. There are more than enough of us here anyhow."

The three girls to whom the remark was collectively addressed looked in the direction indicated by Mrs. Allan, and a common instinct puckered the three pretty faces into an expression of demurrence.

Gertrude Lee, a tall, beautiful girl, spoke first.

"Mrs. Allan is right. It would be a splendid place. I'll let you have it, Maude—"

"Really! your kindness is confusing," Maude Bagot here broke in, bursting into a merry laugh, "but I couldn't think of depriving you."

"Come now, girls, don't be mean," Mrs. Allan said coaxingly.

"I see you are all marking me out for sacrifice," Hilary Nash exclaimed, with a bright smile that did not quite kill a sad look in her eyes.

"Hilary! I always knew you were an angel!" Miss Lee interposed triumphantly, giving her companion's cheek an affectionate little pinch. "Go, dear, no one can resist those melancholy eyes of yours."

And Hilary went.

"She is awfully good," Miss Lee resumed, turning to the others. "I feel positively wicked beside her. Still she is not the sort that makes you unhappy and sharp-tongued. She is always sweet."

"She is a brave little woman," Mrs. Allan said, letting her eyes follow the girl's retreating figure.

"Indeed she is," Gertrude Lee added decisively, "only I wish she could forget that horrid man who treated her so badly. I don't believe she ever will, though."

"You mean Tom Lynne?" Maude Bagot

inquired; "I wonder did he ever marry the widow?"

"Train's in," Mrs. Allan interrupted quickly. "Look to your baskets, girls."

Hilary kept her post faithfully throughout that long, dull day, and many a penny and sixpence found its way into her little basket. There was an appealing modesty about her demeanor which made men look twice at the tender, serious face, and pretty, slight figure, robed in simple dark blue.

Hilary was honestly eager for pennies, and her face indicated as much. No other sentiment either of vanity or self-consciousness spoiled the look of bright expectancy that lit up her features on the approach of a newcomer.

Shortly after midday she went home, "just for a bite," she said to Mrs. Allan as she emptied her basket into the cot. She was speedily back again to her duty.

The afternoon wore away. The girls began to droop. By six o'clock they were all glad to give up their baskets and make for home.

But Mrs. Allan was indefatigable.

"Who's coming back after dinner?" she

asked confidently. "Don't all speak at once."

"I shan't promise," Gertrude Lee said, with affected solemnity, but a lurking catch-me-if-you-can expression in her laughing eyes.

"But she'll be sure to come," Hilary interposed with playful irony, "I'm afraid I'm used up, though."

"What! you!"

"I'm afraid, yes. But I may feel better after dinner."

"You do look tired, child. Never mind, I shan't expect you."

Hilary's face was pale and a little drawn.

"Thanks, but I'll see," she said, smiling as she moved away.

"Ah! so you are back."

Mrs. Allan was scarcely surprised when Hilary reappeared an hour later. She was the only one of the three that turned up.

"Yes, a wash and a good dinner set me up so that I had really no excuse for staying away," Hilary said.

"You are a dear good girl. Watch the trains now. There are a great many people about to-night."

For two more hours Hilary waited and begged,

though with poor success. There seemed to be more confusion and haste about people's comings and goings than there had been during the day.

Few stayed to drop a coin in her basket. Her temporary feeling of refreshment gave way to a depressing weariness. Sad thoughts came trooping into her mind. The night, the loneliness and the rain combined to induce a state of melancholy which was becoming painfully habitual to Hilary.

At such times a strange disgust of life would come over her, and a distinct longing to creep away into a hole and die. It was morbid and unnatural she knew, for at her best she was a girl of considerable spirit and sense, but her judgment was borne down by the keenness of her secret pain. The dreaded mood was closing round her to-night as she stood alone near the entrance of the vaulted passage which led up to the trains. She leaned against the wall and let her face touch the cold white tiles.

"I wonder if I shall ever feel any joy in life again?" she said to herself.

Then she heard hurrying feet and started. A train had come in. There were only a few passengers. She stood in their way and begged, but met no response. They all filed by unheed-

ing her appeal. It was a cruel rounding to her sad reflections.

"I will go home now," she said, in a kind of despair.

Then there were more footsteps.

A man, in a great waterproof coat with a cape, was coming along the passage. In one hand he carried a small handbag, in the other a newspaper and a cane.

"Will you give something for the hospital, please?"

The stranger was hurrying by, but stopped suddenly at the sound of the tremulous voice and the sight of the woman.

Unknown to herself there was an almost tragic depth of earnestness in Hilary's simple formula, repeated for the thousandth time to-day.

The man deliberately laid down his bag, transferred his cane and newspaper from his right to his left hand, drew off his glove, unfastened his outer coat and dived in his pocket. He drew forth a handful of coin and looked at it. A couple of sixpences, a shilling or two, and one bright guinea lay revealed on his broad white palm. He hesitated just for a moment, and then dropped the whole into the girl's basket. As he did he looked straight into her face —and started.

Her eyes were riveted on him with an expression of hopeless entreaty.

"Hilary!" he exclaimed, in a subdued voice, falling back a pace or two. It was three years since they had met.

"I—I—didn't know you," she faltered, "or else—"

He glanced swiftly up and down the passageway. No one was in sight but Mrs. Allan, who held the center beside her cot, and was half lost in the gloom.

"You look tired," he said gently, coming near again.

"I am going home now," she answered, quickly recovering from the sudden rush of her emotions, and moved a step away.

"Not yet," he said, in the imperious way she knew, "please," and he laid his hand on hers to stay her.

She was so tired and cold and unhappy that she lacked strength to resist. In spite of herself she was warmed and thrilled by this man's mere presence.

"I should like to go with you at least," he said, almost abruptly. "May I?"

"I don't know what you mean, Mr. Lynne." She straightened herself up now and spoke proudly.

"I will tell you on the way," he an-

swered humbly. "*I am here for that,* Hilary. Come."

She looked at him half dazed at the sudden strange turn of things in the direction of life, of joy. Then she motioned to her basket and walked away toward Mrs. Allan without saying a word.

He watched her empty the money in the cot and shake hands with the lady who stood by it. Then she turned slowly round and came back to him.

"I am ready," she said briefly.

"Poor child! worn out, I suppose—why *Hilary!*" Mrs. Nash's tone of affectionate sympathy changed to one of undisguised astonishment as her daughter appeared in the parlor doorway, her eyes suffused with brightness and her cheeks glowing with color.

"Well, I declare!" Mr. Nash said good humoredly, pushing back his spectacles to get a better view of the radiant face before him. "Your mother here has been breaking her heart about you, thinking how limp and fagged you'd be after the day, and instead of that you come back looking as saucy and as rosy as if you were going to be married to-morrow." And then Mr. Nash bit his lip, fearing he had made a thoughtless speech.

Hilary read his passing thought and went and put her arms round his neck and drew his kind face down to hers.

"It's all right, dearie, for I *am* going to be married," she whispered into his ear, and seating herself on his knee, she told them, then and there, of the strange happy ending of this memorable Hospital Saturday.

THE END.

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Padden
1847

LIKE LUCIFER

A NOVEL

BY

DENZIL VANE

"*And when he falls, he falls like Lucifer,*
Never to hope again."—SHAKESPEARE

NEW YORK
PETER FENELON COLLIER
1893

LIKE LUCIFER.

BOOK THE FIRST.

CATHERINE'S SORROWS.

Unfriended, new-adopted to our hate,
Dower'd with our curse, and stranger'd with our oath,
Take her . . . . . —*King Lear.*

I, under fair pretense of friendly ends,
And well-placed words of glozing court'sy
Baited with reason not unplausible,
Wind me into the easy-hearted man,
And hug him into snares. —*Comus.*

CHAPTER I.

THE MASTER OF DALLAS TOWERS.

It was the close of a brilliant summer day in the year eighteen hundred and fifty-eight.

The clear amber light of sunset shone in at the open windows of the dining-room at Dallas Towers, and illumined the faces of two men sitting over their after-dinner wine, and talking with far more earnestness than is usual at a time generally devoted to jovial converse uninterrupted by the irrelevancy of feminine remarks, and unshackled by the restrictions imposed by the presence of "the ladies."

In face and figure the two men differed widely. The elder—James Dallas, a hale, hearty man of fifty—was an English country gentleman of good birth and average intelligence. His complexion was healthy and ruddy,

telling of a life spent in the open air; his clear well-opened blue eyes met yours frankly without evasion or uncertainty. So far, so good; the upper part of the face was undeniably handsome, but the mouth and chin were singularly disappointing. The lines of the lips wanted decision; the chin receded slightly, and gave an indefinable but unmistakable look of weakness to the whole countenance.

Those who knew James Dallas well said that few men combined as he did obstinacy with weakness, unforgiving harshness with easy good-nature. These peculiarities of character showed themselves in a variety of odd and contradictory actions. Dallas was an essentially proud man—proud of his good birth and ancient name, proud of his high standing in the county; singularly tenacious of his authority in matters connected with the management of his large estate; yet, during the past two years, he had allowed the man who now sat opposite him at table—drinking his rare old wine as one to the manner born, and bearing himself with the easy assurance arising from perfect familiarity with his present surroundings—to obtain complete mastery over him.

The secret of the younger man's ascendency might have been read—had any of the worthy country squires possessed the requisite penetration—in every line of Bernard Le Marchant's dark and strongly accentuated face; in the resolute, masterful expression of his square massive jaws; in the extraordinary nervous energy apparent in his slight but muscular form.

Le Marchant possessed that intense force of will which is in itself a power capable of all things. Listen to the conversation of these two men—standing in the actual relation of uncle and nephew, yet occupying in reality an inverse position toward each other than that suggested both by age and social standing. The young man spoke in firm, almost commanding tones; the elder listened in attentive silence.

"If you mean Catherine to marry *me*, you must adopt some definite plan of action, or she will go on in her own headstrong way without consulting your wishes. Indeed,

I have every reason to believe that she has already taken matters into her own hands."

"What do you mean by *that*, Bernard?" said Dallas, sharply. "Come, speak out, I hate hints and innuendoes."

"In plain words, uncle, Catherine has allowed that drawing-master fellow—or artist, I suppose he would call himself—to obtain a strong hold over her."

Le Marchant spoke with the contemptuous intolerance of one whose own social position is not based on a sure foundation.

"What! Tristram Lowry?" exclaimed Dallas, violently. "I won't believe it! Catherine would never forget herself so far."

"As I will presently convince you, sir, Catherine *has* so far forgotten her position as your daughter—and *heiress*," retorted Le Marchant, with a sarcastic stress on the last word.

"By Heaven, if she has!" shouted the elder man, in one of the sudden bursts of fury to which he sometimes gave way, "she will bitterly repent her folly. No beggarly artist shall be master of Dallas Towers. The estate is not entailed—"

Here Dallas broke off abruptly and sank into a moody silence which lasted some minutes. Le Marchant observed him with the keen, quiet, masterful glance of one who watches the sullen temper of some animal he means to tame and dominate.

"What would you advise me to do?" said Dallas, rousing himself at length, and looking across at his nephew. The habit of dependence on Le Marchant's judgment had become so rooted of late that it asserted itself in spite of his better reason.

"I would question Catherine herself as to her relations with this Lowry," said Le Marchant, leaning forward and fixing his keen eyes on his uncle's face. "I don't think she will deny that she has met him in secret on more than one occasion."

The moment he had uttered the words, Le Marchant saw his mistake. He had gone a little too far. Dallas sprang to his feet with a fierce oath.

"You shall prove your words, sir, or you leave my house to-morrow!"

James Dallas was weak but he had the heart of a gentleman, and he loved his daughter dearly. For once he asserted himself.

But Le Marchant never flinched. Experience had taught him that his uncle's rare outbursts of temper were only to be subdued by a still fiercer exhibition of rage. His dark face glowed with a dusky flush, his keen, red-brown eyes flashed with sudden anger as he met his uncle's glance of defiance.

"I will prove my words to-night, sir, and you shall beg my pardon for that threat before you are a day older."

Le Marchant's policy succeeded as it always did. The angry defiance died out of Dallas' face with almost startling suddenness, his eyes fell before his nephew's basilisk glance, the look of indecision returned to the weak mouth. In a moment the stronger will, the more powerful individuality, the quicker intelligence had conquered. Dallas was as wax in his nephew's hands.

"I—I did not mean to threaten you, Bernard," he stammered, confusedly. "Come, let us talk over this matter quietly," he continued, resuming his chair and stretching out his hand toward the decanter before him.

These discussions and disagreements with his nephew told on his nerves in an alarming manner. Dallas' healthy skin had turned to a dull white, and his hand shook visibly as he poured out his wine.

"I confess the suddenness of your disclosure startled me, Bernard," he went on, feebly. "Of late I have learned to look on your marriage with Catherine as almost a certainty."

"It shall be a certainty if you follow my advice," said Le Marchant, with quiet determination. "You have only to tell Catherine that, if she chooses to throw herself away on a penniless adventurer she will forfeit her inheritance. I am much mistaken if Mr. Tristram Lowry will not be the first to withdraw from the affair," he added, with a sneer that would not have disgraced Mephistopheles himself.

"You think so?" exclaimed Dallas, eagerly. "I will send for Catherine directly, and tell her the determination I have come to in this matter. She must choose between Tristram Lowry and Dallas Towers. That will settle the matter at once," he added, passing his hand across his forehead as though to sweep all troublesome anxieties from his brain. "I'll trouble you to ring the bell, Bernard—or, stay, perhaps it will be better for me to see the child quietly in her own room."

"Wait a moment, sir," said Le Marchant, a quiet smile fluttering on his thin lips; "there is no need for such haste;—and remember I have first to redeem my promise to you."

"What promise?" asked Dallas, absently, gazing out at the noble stretch of park visible from the windows.

"Your memory is not very good, uncle," replied the other, calmly. "I promised to convince you that Catherine meets Tristram Lowry in secret. I have not forgotten, if you have. Nay, I insist on proving the truth of my words. I am not in the habit of making unfounded accusations of so serious a nature."

"I never said you were," said Dallas, humbly; "but, my dear fellow, you must make allowances for a father's feelings when he hears that his only child is likely to fall a prey to a mere fortune-hunter—"

"I make every allowance for you," interrupted Le Marchant, "but I insist on proving my words."

"What an obstinate fellow you are, Bernard," said Dallas, yielding, as he always did, to his nephew's unbending will. "However, as you are determined to put me through a very painful ordeal, I suppose I must give in."

"If the ordeal be painful, I promise you it shall be short and speedy," replied Le Marchant, quietly. "I must ask you to get your hat and walk with me as far as the Retreat."

The Retreat was a small pavilion, or summer-house on a large scale, situated in a solitary part of the park. Dallas knew that his daughter spent a good deal of her time there. The larger of the two rooms the building

contained had been fitted up as a studio by Catherine's express desire, and Dallas, who rarely opposed the least of her wishes, had allowed her to remove all her artistic paraphernalia to the Retreat, and install herself there as its sole mistress.

Dallas' face darkened ominously as he rose from the table and left the dining-room followed by his nephew.

They crossed the wide stone hall, illumined then with broad bars of gorgeous color as the setting sun streamed through the stained-glass windows. This hall was the distinguishing feature of an otherwise ordinary English country-house; it was one of the numerous instances, scattered throughout the land, of once sacred edifices turned to secular uses. The great hall at Dallas Towers had once been the chapel of a monastery, and, at the Reformation, passed into the possession of an ancestor of the Dallas family. The rest of the house was not more than a couple of centuries old, and in no way remarkable. The rooms were large and lofty, and opened out of each other—an arrangement that gave an air of freshness and brightness to the whole house, besides lending the supreme charm of a vista. But the great hall was strictly Gothic in design, with high-pointed windows and a delicate tracery of stone-work about the groined roof. In the hottest of summer days the hall was cool, shady, and quiet as some secluded world-forgotten cloister—a place to dream away an idle hour, pondering over the manifold changes wrought by Time in that ancient building—once a shrine, now a mere appendage to a country squire's home. *Sic transit gloria mundi!*

Dallas and his nephew crossed this noble hall without a thought of its past or present glories. An intense human interest filled the minds of both. To them the beauty of its delicate stone-work was as naught. They passed into the glow of sunset outside without vouchsafing a glance at the familiar charm of the spot. Custom had staled its infinite variety of loveliness.

They left the house in silence, and by mutual consent at once took the way to the Retreat.

Le Marchant felt that he had hazarded everything on

the events of the next hour: his uncle's favor; his chance of winning Catherine for his wife, and thus gratifying both his love for her and his inherent avarice and ambition. Catherine was her father's sole heiress, while he—Le Marchant—was the penniless son of James Dallas' half-sister, a man dependent on his uncle's bounty—a man without money or prospects, whose success in life depended on his own efforts.

Two years before, he had come to the Towers with a letter written by his mother shortly before her death.

Bernard Le Marchant's early years had been passed in Poverty's hard school, and the creed he had learned there might fitly be expressed in Iago's bitter ethics, the outcome of which is an insatiable craving for wealth—how gotten it matters not. "Put money in thy purse," that was the object of Bernard Le Marchant's life, the Alpha and Omega of his ambition. Money could purchase all he thirsted for. Social standing; worldly success; the envy of his inferiors; the approval of those whom Fortune had favored beyond their just deserts—money would give him all that; money he must and would have at all costs. Nature had given him many gifts, but wealth had been denied him. Wealth must be won.

Le Marchant's earliest recollections of his father were both vague and unpleasant. He remembered a tall, thin man, prematurely aged by a life of dissipation and excess—a man whose cruelty to his long-suffering wife was the indirect cause of her early death.

James Dallas loved his sister tenderly, and, when her son returned to England from the small continental town where she died, he received him kindly, nay, affectionately. As he read the last lines penned by his sister's dying hand, all the pleasant memories of his boyhood returned to him.

It seemed but yesterday that his pretty young sister Mary, the only child of his father's second marriage, was the darling of their home. Mary Dallas' story was a sad and a common one. At eighteen she fell in love with handsome Jack Le Marchant, whose regiment was quar-

tered in the county town, and, in spite of the warnings of her best friends, she overcame her parents' objections to the match and married him.

At first the young wife was dazzled by Le Marchant's charm of manner and pretended devotion to herself; but her happiness was short-lived. She soon discovered that her husband was over head and ears in debt, that his extravagance passed all bounds, and—worse than all—that he was a confirmed gambler.

The history of Jack Le Marchant's downward course is soon told. Mary's fortune, the bait that had tempted him to burden himself with a wife, melted rapidly away at the gaming-table; and Le Marchant was forced to sell his commission to pay his most pressing debts. It was even whispered that, but for the compassion felt by the colonel for Le Marchant's young wife, he would not have been permitted to leave the regiment under such honorable conditions—his extraordinary good luck at cards on more than one occasion having been looked on with suspicion by his brother officers. The affair was, however, mercifully hushed up, and Le Marchant retired to the continent, taking his wife and child with him.

Then commenced the life of alternate reckless extravagance and abject poverty, which Bernard remembered with such bitter loathing—a life that would have corrupted and hardened a character made of far nobler elements than those which composed his powerful but perverted individuality.

From his mother's lips Bernard Le Marchant heard the story of her early girlhood at Dallas Towers, of the strong affection borne toward her by the brother to whose timely charity she had too often been compelled to have recourse, during those periods of temporary poverty when Jack Le Marchant's luck at the gaming-table was persistently bad, and his pockets consequently empty.

When death at last seemed approaching, to give the longed-for release from her miserable fate, Mary Le Marchant wrote a farewell letter to her brother, begging him to befriend her son, and thus save him from the life

of degrading associations that must be his were he left to his father's sole care.

After placing this letter in Bernard's hands, Mary Le Marchant quietly breathed her last.

Bernard only waited to see his mother laid to rest in the peaceful little cemetery near the town where they then lived, before setting out for England. The parting between father and son was curt and frigid—they had little in common, and, as the one redeeming point in Bernard's character was his love for his unhappy mother, he cordially hated the man who had ill-treated her.

On arriving in England, Bernard at once made his way to Dallas Towers, and presented his credentials to his uncle.

What effect Mary Le Marchant's farewell letter had on her brother has already been told. With characteristic impulsiveness James Dallas took his nephew into his house, treating him more as a favorite son than as the penniless dependent he really was. Bernard, with his rare powers of observation sharpened by the life he had ed abroad, was quick to read his uncle's character. He soon knew how to make Dallas' weakness and indecision the means of advancing his own interests.

Young as he was, he was a consummate man of business, and, as he soon discovered, Dallas hated the mere dry details inseparable from the management of a large landed estate; Bernard therefore made himself necessary to his uncle in a hundred ways. By degrees the obliging nephew relieved Dallas of the responsibility of governing the little kingdom over which he ruled.

Every one on the estate soon felt the difference between Le Marchant's iron rule and Dallas' easy-going, good-natured sway. The bailiff—a man who had grown gray in Dallas' service—was dismissed, and Bernard reigned in his stead. So complete was his ascendency over his uncle, that the latter was to all intents and purposes a mere cipher. Le Marchant listened to all complaints from the tenants; Le Marchant renewed leases on his own terms, and many were the muttered complaints of his inflexible harshness—complaints, however, which

never reached Dallas' ears, for he took good care that his own conduct should appear in a favorable light, that his own apparent severity toward the tenants should seem the outcome of his zeal for his uncle's interests.

Catherine was the only stumbling-block in Bernard's path. She was Dallas' only child, and he loved her devotedly. Bernard knew well that, great as was his influence over his uncle, it would not be powerful enough to turn him against his daughter.

As long as Catherine did not wound her father in his tenderest point—his family pride—it was certain that all Bernard's arts would not avail to thrust her from her place in her father's heart. That being the case, he decided on another and a craftier plan of action. Bernard had not been domiciled at the Towers six months before he resolved that he would marry his cousin.

After some cautious sounding of his uncle's intentions with regard to Catherine's settlement in life, he ventured to impart his hopes to Dallas. Fortune favored him. Dallas listened to Bernard's bold proposition with eager attention. One of the problems that had perplexed his simple mind since Bernard's advent at the Towers, was how to provide suitably for him, without defrauding Catherine of what was rightfully hers. Bernard's proposition seemed to offer an easy solution of the difficulty. The nephew whose fortunes he wished to forward, and the beloved daughter whose happiness he was eager to secure, would alike be benefited by this arrangement: Bernard would be the master of Dallas Towers; Catherine would have a husband in every way worthy of her.

Catherine, however, with her sex's proverbial perversity, refused to listen to the project, and turned from her cousin's advances with positive aversion. Her quick instinct warned her against the man who had so strange an influence over her father, and she was revolted by Bernard's specious manners and suave flatteries.

Thwarted in this his most cherished plan, Le Marchant's whole energies were bent on undermining Catherine's position as her father's heiress, by poisoning his benefactor's mind against her—a consummation he knew

well would be attained were he to inform him of the attachment which existed between Catherine and the young artist, Tristram Lowry. Bernard had discovered by a lucky accident that the lovers met in secret, and he lost no time in acquainting Dallas with the fact, knowing as he did that his uncle's pride would be deeply wounded by his daughter's deceit.

But he did not foresee the terrible results that would accrue from his evening's work—had he so foreseen, even his callous heart might have relented ere it was too late; his busy, scheming brain might have planned another road to fortune than that which had its commencement in the ruin of his cousin's whole life.

CHAPTER II.

LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.

CATHERINE DALLAS was a beautiful girl of twenty when Fate brought Tristram Lowry across her path. Hers was a quick, warm, impulsive nature, without a trace of her father's haughty pride or her cousin's worldly wisdom. Her open, fearless honesty was no match for Bernard's craft; she showed him plainly that she both disliked and distrusted him. In fact, Catherine's antipathy toward her cousin was so deeply rooted that nothing but respect for her father's wishes made her treat him with any show of cordiality; she could not pretend to any warmth of cousinly affection, so Bernard was fain to be content with the most distant politeness on her part—a politeness that was doubly irritating, inasmuch as it left him no ground either for quarreling with Catherine, or for complaint to his uncle.

Tristram Lowry's appearance on the scene gave the final blow to Bernard's hopes of winning Catherine for his wife, and jealousy was added to the various passions already raging in his breast.

Catherine had a marked taste for Art, and her evident talent demanded a fuller scope than that usually afforded

to the efforts of young lady amateurs. James Dallas, who seldom denied his daughter the gratification of her whims, was easily persuaded to secure the services of a really efficient instructor, and Tristram Lowry, a young artist of some promise, was duly installed at Dallas Towers as Catherine's drawing-master. A couple of rooms were placed at the young artist's disposal, and it was understood that, excepting such hours as were devoted to Catherine's instruction, Mr. Lowry's time was his own.

Dallas was charmed with their new inmate, and, before Lowry had been a month at the Towers, Dallas displayed his lack of judgment and knowledge of the world. He requested the young artist to paint Catherine's portrait.

Le Marchant, with his usual acumen, soon guessed what would be the consequences of his uncle's thoughtlessness. He saw how events were tending. Catherine was herself placing the most powerful of all weapons in his hands, and he was resolved to use his new power over her without mercy.

Had Catherine's mother been living, her maternal instincts would have warned her of the danger to a young and inexperienced girl, in the long hours of companionship with one whose rare charm of manner and innate distinction of appearance rendered him in every respect the very ideal of a young girl's fancy.

Tristram Lowry's talents were not of the highest order, but he painted with wonderful facility, a certain charm of treatment, and a delicate perception of the harmony of color. He was besides young, strikingly handsome, enthusiastic, ambitious of fame, and to Catherine he seemed a genius of the purest water. On the other hand, Lowry never realized the depth and width of the social gulf between the young heiress and himself. He was but two-and-twenty, and at that golden age all things seem possible. To his buoyant fancy, the difficult path which leads to Fame and Fortune seemed strewn with flowers—he knew nothing of the cruel thorns beneath them. To his ardent and poetic mind, it seemed that the gift of his devotion was an offering fit for the acceptance

of the highest lady in the land—it never struck him that, in the eyes of all right-minded people, Catherine Dallas, the wealthy heiress, was as far above him as the stars. Catherine, though young in years, knew more of the world than her lover. She knew that her father, in spite of the easy pliability and surface good-nature of his character, could be obstinate enough on some points, and would bitterly resent any infraction of the law of the Medes and Persians, which decrees that a young lady of fortune shall marry in her own rank of life. She was, besides, fully aware of her cousin's intentions regarding herself, and she feared to arouse his enmity against Tristram. Her quick instincts warned her that Bernard was now her bitterest foe, for she knew that the secret of her love for Tristram was no secret to him. Le Marchant, however, held his hand; he waited for Time to mature his plans.

In due course Lowry completed Catherine's portrait, and returned to London; but he did not leave Dallas Towers without coming to an understanding with her. It was arranged that Catherine was to break the fact of their engagement to her father. Lowry was anxious to plead his cause in person, never doubting that Dallas would accept him with open arms as a suitor for his daughter's hand; but Catherine, who was keenly alive to the darker side of their prospects, begged him to leave the matter in her hands. Tristram yielded, after some demur, to her wishes, only stipulating that he should see her often. Thus it was that those secret and fatal meetings at the Retreat were arranged, and Le Marchant given the opportunity, which he had so long sought, of estranging Dallas from his daughter.

Such is the irony of Fate! Catherine had made up her mind to confess to her father on the following morning her love for Tristram, and her intention of becoming his wife. More than once she had approached the subject, but, in spite of all her good resolutions, she could not brace her nerves to encounter the storm of anger she knew would fall upon her head when he was made aware of the truth.

This fatal reticence was destined to entail terrible consequences both on Catherine and on her lover. Well for us that the future is hidden from our sight, that we live on from day to day never thinking of the sword of Damocles impending over our heads by a single hair, that we awake in the morning in light-hearted unconsciousness of the blow that is to fall ere night!

That brilliant summer evening on which Bernard played the traitor, Catherine hastened to the usual trysting-place, her face glowing with the eager hopes of youth, her soft cheeks flushed, her large, clear gray eyes radiant with that beautiful, liquid inner light which tells of perfect happiness.

As she crossed the park on her way to the Retreat, she hummed a tune to herself in sheer exuberance of joy. The summer sky above was not more serenely bright than the future which stretched before her mind's eye. Tristram Lowry loved her, and she loved him. That one sentence expressed the intense and boundless happiness which filled her life. He—a heaven-born genius, one of those lucky mortals on whom the gods have showered their choicest gifts of mental and physical endowments—thought her, Catherine Dallas, worthy to be the companion of his life. With the humility of true love, she wondered where lay the charm that had drawn him to her. Surely Tristram loved her for something more than the mere beauty of color and form which had charmed his artist's eye; surely his love would survive the fleeting charms of youth and beauty; surely his devotion was something more than a young man's passionate but evanescent love!

Catherine walked on toward the Retreat, still singing to herself. Tristram, who stood watching her from the small, rose-embowered window of their trysting-place, thought she looked like an incarnate sunbeam as she came rapidly toward him. She was bareheaded, for one of her whims was a dislike to any form of outdoor headgear when within the precincts of the park; consequently her broad-brimmed hat was more often swinging over her arm than on her head. It was so now, and the level

sun-rays shone full on her happy face, on the bright masses of golden-brown hair pushed carelessly back from her broad white forehead.

Years after the remembrance of Catherine as she looked then, in all the freshness of her youthful bloom, would rise before his mind's eye with cruel distinctness, as if to reproach him with the sorrow that embittered her innocent, happy girlhood—the sorrow which fell on her through him.

Tristram came forward to meet her as she entered the summer-house. Coming suddenly from the intense brilliancy and gorgeous glow of the sunset world without, the studio looked dark and full of strange shadows. She glanced round nervously, as though fearing that some of the shadows were tangible; but the warm, living touch of Tristram's hands reassured her, and she looked up trustingly in his face. All must be well since he was by her side.

Tristram Lowry was a tall, handsome man, looking somewhat older than his years, with a clear, pale complexion, classically correct features, and large, dark, dreamy-looking eyes. Not a man to battle with the world and compel success, not one gifted with the iron perseverance, the untiring, indomitable patience which are among the noblest attributes of true genius. Rather one to shrink sensitively from everything disagreeable, to be easily discouraged by failure, easily crushed by misfortune.

Catherine, however, observed none of these defects in her lover's character; she saw only the gentle, lovable face, the poetic, dark eyes, the winning charm of manner; for she loved him as a woman loves but once in her life, and, woman-like, she refused to see any flaw in the idol she had set up for herself.

"You are later than usual, Catherine," said Lowry, in the soft and low tones she knew and loved so well. "I have been here nearly an hour."

"I could not get away before," replied Catherine. "Papa and Bernard were late for dinner. They rode over to Compton Magna on business, and, I suppose, they were

detained. What a long, tedious affair dinner was! I thought it would never end. Papa and Bernard are still sitting over their wine; so we are quite safe for an hour at least."

"Catherine," began Tristram, gravely, "how long is this to last? I cannot endure this secrecy. It is galling to me to know that I can only see you by stealth—doubly so, when I know that your cousin Bernard can be with you any hour of the day without the necessity for deceit."

"My cousin Bernard is not favored with much of my society," retorted Catherine, with a slight compression of her delicate lips. "I don't think you need be jealous of *him*, Tristram," she added, looking up at him with a gleam of mischief in her eyes.

"I am not," replied Lowry, tenderly. "I should be unworthy of your love, dearest, if I could find room for jealousy in the heart that is given wholly to you."

Catherine's momentary petulance was soothed by this pretty speech. Tristram Lowry was an adept in the art of showering verbal *confetti;* and the slight cloud of vexation vanished from her fair face.

She let him kiss the slim, white fingers he held, with a girlish assumption of queenly dignity that he thought infinitely winning.

"Now that you have made the *amende honorable*, Tristram, I will condescend to inform you what I intend to do," she said, seating herself in a deep easy-chair, and pointing to a low stool at her feet, which lowly position Tristram accepted with becoming humility.

Catherine leaned back in her chair, and clasped her hands beneath her head. She was silent. Her eyes were fixed thoughtfully on the bit of bright blue sky visible from the window.

Tristram looked at her in silent admiration. For the moment, the artist triumphed over the lover. In truth, Catherine made a lovely picture as she sat there in the shadowy gloom. The fashion of her gown showed the exquisitely tender curves of her full, white throat. The sleeves were long and loose, falling back from her rounded arms and taper wrists; and the gauzy folds of muslin

that draped her girlish form veiled but did not hide its willowy grace.

What wonder that Tristram longed to transfer such a picture to canvas. Was it not a positive disloyalty to Art to allow such matchless beauty to fade without transmitting it to posterity? Should not his brush immortalize her name, as Gainsborough's has that of the peerless Duchess of Devonshire?

Tristram gazed at her in silence, fascinated by the witchery of the beauty he worshiped, as only an artist or a poet can. Catherine was one of the few women whose grace—that rarest of gifts—equaled her beauty. Every movement of the lithe figure, every turn of the well-poised head was instinct with the pliant ease that is in itself a subtle charm.

"I have made up my mind to tell papa of our engagement," said Catherine, suddenly, looking down at her lover.

Tristram started slightly; he had almost forgotten the subject of their conversation, so rapt was he in the contemplation of her rare and perfect loveliness. He heaved a sigh of relief.

"Then all this uncertainty will soon end; I shall no longer be compelled to spend whole days without a glimpse of the face I love so well—the face that is the load-star of my life, Catherine," said Tristram, softly.

Catherine smiled down at him brightly, but her eyes still looked thoughtful.

"Do not be too hopeful, Tristram," she said, letting her arms fall and clasping her hands on her lap. "I know my father better than you do. He has set his heart on my marrying my cousin Bernard, and—"

"But Mr. Le Marchant is as penniless as I—nay, his position is far inferior to mine, for surely my Art has some dignity," burst out Tristram, impetuously.

"I don't think you understand the influence Bernard has over my father," said Catherine, sighing; "my cousin has determined to be the master of Dallas Towers either by fair means or foul—so I suppose he thinks the easiest way to that desirable position is to marry me."

"But surely—surely your father would not force you to marry him against your will; surely he would not ignore your own feelings on the subject," said Tristram, with rising anger. "Catherine, if you tell him you love *me*, he would not ask you to give your hand to your cousin—when your heart is *mine*," he added, in a tone of exultation.

"I don't know—my father can be very obstinate sometimes," answered Catherine, sighing dubiously; then, with a quick impulse of tenderness, she bent down and kissed her lover's forehead. "Oh, Tristram, I fear our days of happiness are over," she said, with passionate sadness; "we have lived our dream of love and joy—how I dread the awakening!"

"Dearest love, it is a dream that will last our lives!" replied Tristram, clasping her to his breast with sudden passion.

The hour Catherine dreaded was nearer at hand than she thought. At the moment Tristram's arms were thrown round her a shadow fell between them and the sunset sky—a shadow which blotted out the soft, evening light like a sudden thunder-cloud portending storm.

James Dallas, with his healthy, ruddy face blanched to a dull, ghastly pallor, his bright, blue eyes dark with passion, his right hand clinched and uplifted in an attitude of menace, stood glaring at them in speechless rage.

For a moment Catherine gazed at her father in mute terror; it was the first time she had seen his temper roused to the white heat of passion. She clung to Tristram, pale and trembling. The window-sill was low, and the sash raised. With the agility of a young man, Dallas cleared it at a bound.

"Loose my daughter, sir, or, by Heaven! I shall be the death of you," he shouted, mad with rage. "Catherine," he added, turning furiously on her, "nothing but sight would have convinced me of your shameful deceit."

The words roused her from the momentary stupor into which she had fallen. She drew herself from Tristram's encircling arms, the warm color flushed into her cheeks,

and her eyes flashed angrily. Father and daughter were startlingly alike as they faced each other.

"You have no right to use such words to me, papa," she cried, passionately; "I never meant to deceive you, but—"

"Do not attempt to excuse yourself; the facts against you are too strong," retorted Dallas, fiercely. "It is enough that you have met this man in secret," he added, with a wrathful glance at Lowry, who stood with a pale but resolute face waiting until Dallas' storm of rage should subside. But the contemptuous reference to himself stung him past endurance.

"Allow *me* to bear any blame that we may deserve from you," he interrupted, stepping to Catherine's side and taking her hand in his.

The action roused Dallas to fury; he raised his clinched hand, and, but for Le Marchant's timely intervention, he would have felled Tristram to the ground with one savage blow.

Le Marchant, who had wisely allowed Dallas to enter the Retreat alone, was not, however, far from the scene of action. He had waited, with his usual diplomatic astuteness, for the result of the interview at a discreet distance, until the sound of voices raised in anger warned him that the time for interference had come.

"My dear sir, do not let your anger—your *just* anger, I admit," he added, with a triumphant glance at Catherine's pale, frightened face—"make you forget your paternal affection for my cousin."

The ill-concealed sarcasm of this speech, though it failed to wound Catherine, fulfilled Le Marchant's intention of adding fuel to the flame of her father's anger.

"She has proved herself utterly unworthy of my affection," said Dallas, angrily, though not without a slight tremor in his voice; then, as his eyes fell on Tristram Lowry's pale, handsome face, he added—"What have *you* to say to me, sir? What right have you to lift your eyes to my daughter?—what right have you to speak for her, to couple her name with yours?"

"The best right," replied Tristram, calmly—"your daughter is my betrothed wife."

"It is a lie!" shouted Dallas, violently.

"It is true," said Catherine, drawing up her slender figure to its full height, and flashing a proud, defiant glance at her father and Le Marchant.

"Are you mad, Catherine? You, the heiress of Dallas Towers, marry a penniless artist! But no, the *heiress* of Dallas Towers shall not do so," cried Dallas. "Catherine, you must choose between your lover and your inheritance. If you marry Tristram Lowry, you will go to him without a shilling."

The last words were uttered in the low tone of dogged obstinacy that Catherine knew well—and dreaded. She looked at him for an instant in silence, her lips quivered slightly, and she turned away to hide the rush of tears which dimmed her eyes. Her father's cold tones wounded her far more deeply than his previous anger. Nothing but the presence of the man she hated saved her from a passionate outburst of weeping. She controlled herself, however, with a strong effort, but she dared not trust herself to speak.

"Choose," said Dallas, doggedly, "will you be *my* heiress or *his* wife?" he added, pointing to Tristram.

Catherine felt Le Marchant's sinister gaze on her face. A shudder of intense repulsion passed through her as she raised her eyes for an instant and met his cold, watchful glance. She knew instinctively who had betrayed her.

"Choose," repeated Dallas, in a louder tone, "between his love and mine."

Catherine's fingers tightened their clasp on Tristram's hand. The warm, human contact exercised a magical effect on her. A flood of color rushed to her pale cheeks; her eyes, drowned in tears a moment since, shone out clear and radiant as an April sky after rain.

"I have chosen," she said, in her sweet, clear, thrilling tones. "I will be Tristram's wife, for he loves me, and I love him."

Le Marchant, who had hitherto been a silent spectator

of the whole scene, came quietly forward, and laid his hand on his uncle's arm.

"Come, sir; there is nothing more to be said. Catherine has made her choice—I hope she may never repent it."

For one single moment the mask of smiling courtesy was lifted. Catherine saw her enemy in his true colors; saw the deadly hatred toward herself—that undying, unforgiving hate which is never slaked—the hatred that has once been love. A cold presentiment of coming evil crept over her; she shivered as though smitten by a sudden chill blast.

Le Marchant saw the change in her expression, and knew that the breach between them would never be bridged over, that henceforth it would be war to the death. Any lingering hopes he might hitherto have indulged vanished forever, and the passionate love he had lavished on her so freely was turned to relentless enmity as she acknowledged her love for Lowry.

The effect of Catherine's words on Dallas was of a twofold character. At first anger had full sway over him; then pride asserted itself, and reigned supreme. She had avowed her love for this wretched artist-lover of hers in no measured phrase. It was evident that she had made her decision, and meant to abide by it. Dallas never doubted that she would keep to her decision—he read that much in her face; he meant to keep his.

"You are right, Bernard," he said, turning to his nephew with a miserable attempt at a smile. "There is nothing more to be said. Catherine has made her choice. From this day she is no daughter of mine. I thank God that you are still left me—I shall not be quite alone in my old age."

The last words, spoken in a low and broken voice, touched a chord in Catherine's warm young heart. She came a step nearer, and would have taken his hand, but Dallas drew back.

"You have chosen," he said, harshly.

"Papa, don't let us part—if part we must—in anger. I can't break my promise to Tristram; but surely—surely you will not cast me from your heart—"

"Speak for me, Bernard," said Dallas, appealing as usual to his nephew in all moments of hesitation. Le Marchant saw that his purpose already wavered—Catherine's appeal had made some impression. He hastened to counteract the effect of her words.

"Catherine," he began, sternly, "your father bade you choose between your lover and your filial duty—you have chosen the first. As Tristram Lowry's wife you will not be received at Dallas Towers; as Tristram Lowry's wife you will forfeit the wealth and the position you enjoy as James Dallas' daughter. Have I rightly interpreted your wishes, sir?" he added, turning to Dallas, who was restlessly pacing up and down the little room.

Thus appealed to, Dallas turned a pale, haggard face on the speaker.

"Yes," he said, hoarsely.

The extraordinary change in him startled both Le Marchant and Catherine. Every trace of color had faded from his cheek, his eyes were wild and bloodshot, his lips twitched convulsively. He looked like a man whose very soul was torn by the strength of the emotion which shook him.

"Father!" cried Catherine, running impulsively to his side.

But Dallas waved her back, and Le Marchant's pale lips murmured in her ear,

"You have made your choice, Catherine. *My* place is now at your father's side."

CHAPTER III.

EXTRACTS FROM THE DIARY OF TRISTRAM LOWRY.

"November 17th, 1873.

"To-day another disappointment has come to me. The picture-dealer who has hitherto purchased my paintings informs me that he has no further demand for my productions. Fate is hard on me. At times I am seized

with paroxysms of fearful depression, from which not even my wife's loving words can rouse me. Poverty, horrible, sordid, hopeless poverty stares us in the face. A curse seems to have fallen upon me since my marriage. I would not for worlds that Catherine should read these lines, but it is some relief to my overtaxed brain to write them. The mere mechanical work of writing is better than the enforced idleness to which I am condemned. My beloved Art is dead to me, for I dare not trench on the miserable sum that stands between us and starvation, by the expenditure of a few shillings on paints and canvases. Indeed, I have on hand more pictures than I am ever likely to dispose of.

"Has my right hand lost its cunning?—or has the tide of fortune set against me in such overwhelming strength that my feeble endeavors to breast it are worse than futile?

"When I look in Catherine's wan, harassed face, on which care has already set such ineffaceable marks; when I see how her beauty has faded, how completely her brave spirit is broken by long years of poverty and misfortune; when I see our child's pale, thin cheeks and fragile frame, I am tempted to cry out 'my punishment is greater than I can bear.'

"Was I right to accept the sacrifice which Catherine made in marrying me? Was I right to drag her down to such poverty as this? I cannot say. I only know that I acted for the best. For fifteen years Catherine has b[illegible] to me a gentle, faithful, and most loving wife; for fift[illegible] years we have struggled on against overwhelming od[illegible] I have dragged the woman I love down to the deepes[illegible] depths of poverty; and yet, God knows, I would shed my heart's blood in Catherine's service. . . . My life has been a failure. . . .

"November 18th.

"I closed my diary last night with the saddest words a man can well write, '*My life has been a failure.*' I read them over this morning with a remorseful pang. No life can be an utter failure that has been blessed by the pure

unselfish love of a woman. When I think of all Catherine has sacrificed for my sake—the wealth and luxury she has exchanged for poverty and hardship—I feel how unworthy I am of her love. To-day I am determined to make one more effort to obtain work—no matter how sordid or ill-paid it may be, so long as I can earn enough to keep wife and child from absolute starvation. . . . .

"November 20th.

"I answered an advertisement in yesterday's newspaper, offering employment as clerk in a merchant's office. It was the usual story. When asked if I had been employed in a similar capacity before, I could only answer in the negative. When questioned as to my past profession, I could only say that I had been and still was an artist, but that I had no sale for my pictures. I was dismissed with the curt observation that the firm only employed men of some experience in the duties of a clerk, and that, even were they disposed to give me a trial, the fact of my avowed failure in another profession did not speak in my favor.

"I was too sick at heart to question the soundness of the head-clerk's logic. I left the office in despair, and returned to the wretched lodging that is now our home. I found Catherine stitching away at a dress for Vivien. The child's rapid growth makes increasing demands on [illegible] wife's feminine ingenuity. She looked wearily up [illegible] her task as I entered the room. I was struck anew [illegible] the change in her. Day by day her cheeks grow [illegible]ore hollow, her eyes brighter, her fragile figure more painfully thin and wasted. My heart tightened with a sudden, awful dread, as I looked at her. Is my wife slowly fading from me?

"Oh, God! I dare not think of it. And yet—and yet, when I listen to that hacking cough—that labored breath . . . . I *will* not think of it . . . .

"December 15th.

"Since I last opened my diary my worst anticipations

have been realized. Catherine is ill—dangerously ill. How will it all end? God knows!

"I write this at night, as I sit in my wife's room. She is sleeping quietly now, after a feverish, restless day. I have sent Vivien to bed, much against her will. The child has scarcely left the sick-room for days. With a womanly patience and gentleness far beyond her years, she has tended the mother she loves with a quiet intensity that makes me tremble.

"What will become of my child, if— But I *will* not despair! Surely help must come soon; surely there are limits to human suffering . . . . I can write no more; my brain is on fire with distracting thoughts . . . .

"January 3d, 1874.

"Catherine has rallied slightly since I last wrote in my diary. The doctor says there is no actual disease. He questioned me very closely respecting my wife's health and spirits in the past. One question he asked struck to my heart like a knell: 'Was there consumption in my wife's family?' I replied that I believed not, though I could not speak with any certainty. I begged him to tell me if Catherine herself was threatened with the disease. The doctor replied that he had every reason to hope that it might be averted, if Catherine were removed *at once* to a milder climate—the South of France, or, if she were not able to undertake so long a journey, a change to any of the sheltered watering-places on the English coast would have an undoubtedly good effect on her health. A generous diet was absolutely essential.

"I listened to the doctor's words in silence. I think he guessed my thoughts; for he turned to my little Vivien, patted her kindly on the arm, and bade her 'go on taking care of her mother, who would soon be better.' Before I could command my voice sufficiently to thank him for his kindness (he had quietly put aside the fee I tried to slip into his hand as he passed me) he had left the room.

"Vivien came to me, and wound her thin little arms round my neck. She looked white and scared, and her large eyes searched my face inquiringly.

'Papa,' she said, in a frightened whisper, 'does the doctor think mamma is *very* ill?'

"Then my self-control forsook me. I hid my face on the child's shoulder, and burst into a passion of sobs and tears. Heaven help me! I suppose the strain of the last few weeks has told on a body already weakened by privation. Vivien's terrified attempts at consolation soon brought me to my senses. I hastened to reassure her as to the cause of my agitation. Child as she is, I think she understood what I was suffering.

"My poor child has, alas! been early inured to poverty in one of its direst forms—the poverty that is too proud to beg; that bears the cruel pangs of hunger in silence . . . . I dismissed her with a kiss, to her mother's bedside; for I longed to be alone, to face the extent of the calamity that has befallen us . . . .

"January 7th.

"After many bitter struggles with my pride, I have at last resolved to appeal to Catherine's father, to break the silence we have maintained toward him for fifteen years. Catherine has consented to let me try to obtain an interview with him, if possible, without Bernard Le Marchant's knowledge. My wife seems to fear this man's evil influence over her father with almost superstitious dread.

"During these years of separation from all her relatives and friends, we have had little opportunity of hearing more than the scanty items of news gathered from the daily papers. It was thus we heard of Bernard Le Marchant's marriage, which took place within a year of our own; then that a daughter had been born to him. A strange coincidence. *His* daughter will in all probability inherit the wealth which should rightly have been Vivien's. I often wonder whether, in the distant future, Fate will ever bring my child and her unknown cousin together. Their paths in life are widely sundered in the present . . . .

"January 8th.

"Much to my surprise, Catherine takes a very hopeful

view of the projected appeal to her father's generosity. To-night she talked of the old happy time at Dallas Towers, before Le Marchant had gained such fatal influence over her father's mind. Something of her former spirit and animation returned. With her thin cheeks glowing with a soft flush, her eyes bright and liquid, her long waving hair, which still retains its color and abundance, flowing over the pillow, her beauty shone out with almost startling brilliancy.

"Vivien, who, as usual, sat by her mother's side, gazed at her in silent wonder at the marvelous change. Poor child! it was a new experience for her to see her pale, sad-faced mother flushed and eager, to hear her quiet voice take the clear, ringing tones of happiness and hope. I ask myself again, 'How will it all end?' . . .

"January 9th.

"Catherine has decided that the appeal to her father's generosity is to be made without further delay. If help is to be of any real use to either of us, it must come *soon*. How and where to see Mr. Dallas is the great difficulty. It is absolutely essential, if the appeal is to bear any fruit, for me to see him alone. In all probability, Le Marchant exercises the same fatal influence over him as of old, and keeps a strict watch over his movements. The question is how this vigilance is to be baffled.

"The first thing is to ascertain whether Mr. Dallas is now in London. Should he be at the Towers, the difficulties in our way will not easily be surmounted. First there would be the necessity for delay, then the difficulty of obtaining the requisite sum of money for the journey.

"At first I suggested communicating with Mr. Dallas by letter, but Catherine at once declared that such a step would be worse than useless.

" 'It would only put Bernard Le Marchant on his guard,' was her instant reply.

"I tried to reason her out of her intense distrust of her cousin, but her only answer was,

" 'He has been my evil genius, Tristram; I only pray that he may not cross my child's path.'

"Fear for Vivien's future has evidently occupied most of Catherine's waking thoughts since her illness. More than once I have seen her eyes follow the child about the room; more than once I have seen traces of tears on her cheeks when Vivien has been busy with some small household care. I can see that the possibility of her being cast friendless on the world causes my wife the same cruel anxiety it has caused, and still causes, *me* . . . .

"January 17th.

"A week has passed since I made any entry in my diary. During that time I have succeeded in finding out Mr. Dallas' present abode. He is now living in a furnished house in Brook Street, Mayfair. I have made cautious inquiries in various quarters, and have elicited the following items of intelligence respecting his present habits of life. Mr. Dallas is staying in London for the purpose of consulting an eminent physician about his health, which is in a very precarious state. His household consists of his nephew, his nephew's wife and daughter, and several servants. Since his arrival at Brook Street, Mr. Dallas has only once left the house. I learned these and some other particulars from a talkative assistant at the chemist's shop where Mr. Dallas' prescriptions are made up.

"It is evident that, if I am to attain my object, the only course possible is for me to present myself at the house in Brook Street and ask to see Mr. Dallas on important business. The simplest plan of action is often the best. There is just a chance that the very boldness of the proceeding will disarm suspicion. We are, of course, quite in the dark as to Le Marchant's schemes, but I have little doubt that he has ingratiated himself so completely with Mr. Dallas that his ultimate possession of the Dallas estates is almost a matter of certainty. Catherine will not entertain the idea of any appeal being made to Le Marchant himself. She shrinks from the mere thought of my seeing or speaking to the man whose evil counsels have had such a fatal effect on her father's character. Catherine is possessed by the idea that her disobedience

would have been forgiven years ago, but for her cousin's influence . . . .

"January 18th.

"Vivien is to accompany me to her grandfather's house to-morrow. Catherine has great hopes that the sight of her child will plead more powerfully for her than any words of mine. There is such innate truthfulness and straightforwardness about our child that, young as she is, I felt it right to tell her the real object of our visit. For the first time, therefore, Vivien has learned something of her parents' history. She listened in silence, with her large, clear eyes fixed on my face, and when I concluded the story of our early sorrows, she crept close to my side and wound her slight arms about my neck. She did not utter a word, but I knew that her vivid imagination had been strongly excited; there was a thoughtful pucker on her brow as she listened to her mother's story.

"Vivien is, in many ways, a strange child, and I am often at a loss how to treat her. At times there is a quiet self-contained reserve about her that is at variance with the childish gayety natural to her years—for, thank God! poverty has not yet crushed such gayety from her heart.

"Vivien's beauty—for her pale face *is* beautiful in spite of its thinness—is of no common order. The low, arched forehead is of commanding breadth and gives promise of rare mental power. Her eyes are large and clear, dark gray in color, like her mother's, with long, black, upward-turning lashes—eyes of wonderful expression and sweetness. Time has yet to develop the slight, childish figure and the delicate high-bred features.

"Catherine is confident that Vivien will be the peacemaker between her father and herself. To-night she called her to her bedside, and talked to her long and earnestly in whispered tones. I could not distinguish the words, for I was sitting apart at the window; but I guessed that Catherine had confided to her some message of grave import to be given to Mr. Dallas, if we succeed in gaining admittance to-morrow to the house in Brook Street."

CHAPTER IV.

THE HOUSE IN BROOK STREET.

It was one of the raw-cold days, only too familiar to those whom necessity compels to pass the whole winter in London—a day that has none of winter's best characteristics, but is only dull, gloomy, and depressing: a day when the sky is an uninterrupted expanse of leaden gray, without a single gleam of sunshine to redeem its cheerless monotony; when the air is neither pleasantly mild nor briskly bracing, but blows cuttingly round exposed corners, with the ruthless determination to pierce to the very marrow the hapless pedestrians trudging through the muddy streets, with bent heads, chilled fingers, and blue noses.

The whole scene was the reverse of exhilarating. The parks and squares—their gaunt, naked, smoke-begrimed trees, dripping with damp, looming fantastically through the mist—were given over to desolation and decay. The melancholy chirp of a legion of bedraggled sparrows was the only sound that broke the dreary silence of those wide open spaces, which in spring and summer are the delight of thousands who would otherwise seldom, or ever, taste the joy of seeing trees, and grass, and flowers grow and flourish under the wide vault of heaven.

The streets, though noisy and busy, as London streets always are and must be, in spite of the absence of the fashionable world—that small section of Humanity called Society—were not a much pleasanter spectacle. The mud asserted itself everywhere, in spite of the efforts of the scavengers. The pavements were slippery; the clinging damp hung like a pall over the whole city.

Tristram Lowry buttoned his threadbare coat across his chest, as he faced the rasping wind. He was not alone: many glances followed the child who, with her small hand clasped tightly in his, walked by his side.

Vivien's picturesque curls and delicate features attract-

ed much attention from the passers-by. She was tall for her age, and the expression of earnest gravity on her face made her look almost a woman. Neither spoke a word, for both knew the extreme—the vital importance of their errand. But, now and again, Vivien cast an anxious glance at her father's pinched and haggard face; at the thin figure, prematurely bent with the weight of sorrow they had patiently borne for so many years. As she looked at him, her eyes filled.

The secret of Tristram Lowry's failure in life was written in every line of the refined and still handsome features, in the almost womanly softness of the dark eyes, round which time and anxiety had traced deep wrinkles, in the sensitive curve of his lips. He was one of those who have failed to realize the glorious dreams of youth. One of those on whom poverty and disappointment have no bracing, no inspiring effect. One rather to need the sunshine of happiness, the rapture of success, to bring to perfect fruition the talents which Nature had bestowed on him.

Misfortune had come to Tristram Lowry, and he had sunk beneath its weight. The unquestionable gifts with which he was dowered had not availed him in the struggle of life, for he lacked the patient indifference to defeat, the quiet but unswerving determination to achieve success in spite of all obstacles, without which nothing really great is ever accomplished.

Ambition had tempted him along the difficult path which leads to Fame, but, having lost his place in the great race, he owned himself beaten, and sank under the knowledge that he had failed in the career that had once promised so fairly.

Tristram trudged on, with Vivien at his side, through the cold and damp of that dreary January afternoon. His heart was heavy within him. The cruel anxieties of the past week had tried his bodily strength to the utmost. With all his faults, Lowry loved his wife and child; he suffered cruelly in seeing them suffer. He could bear cold and hunger himself without a murmur, but his heart was wrung with bitter anguish and rebellious despair

when he thought of his sick, perhaps dying, wife; of his innocent child in need of the bare necessaries of life.

In his secret soul Lowry hoped little from the long-thought-of, anxiously-planned visit to his father-in-law's house. But he would not damp Catherine's ardent anticipations—he dared not quench the one spark of hope that served to brighten the cheerless darkness of their lives.

The distance was considerable from their humble lodgings in Lambeth to the fashionable quarter where James Dallas lived. Dusk was deepening into night before Lowry and Vivien reached Brook Street.

With characteristic indecision, Lowry took several turns up and down the street before he could nerve himself to ring the bell and ask to see Mr. Dallas, in the ordinary tone of a visitor. His pride, too, suffered greatly in having to approach his father-in-law literally *in formâ pauperis.*

Then the thought of Catherine recurred to his mind—Catherine ill, dying, perhaps, for want of the necessaries of life, while her father was lavishing his wealth on one whose claim on him was naught in comparison with hers. The thought was unendurable.

Lowry's momentary hesitation vanished; he approached Dallas' door and boldly rang the bell.

"I wish to see Mr. Dallas on important business," he said to the servant who answered his summons.

The man looked at the shabby clothes, the worn shoes, the gloveless hands of the speaker, and shrugged his shoulders.

"My master never gives to beggars," he said, stepping back preparatory to shutting the door in Lowry's face.

"I am no beggar—" began Lowry, his thin cheeks crimsoning angrily. He stopped abruptly and bit his lip as he remembered that the servant's words were practically true. He *had* come to beg.

"You look like one," retorted the man, with another glance at Lowry's shabby coat.

"Will you give my name to your master? I feel sure Mr. Dallas would see me if he knew my errand," said Low-

ry, patiently. "Tell him that Tristram Lowry begs for five minutes' conversation with him *alone*."

"Well, there can be no harm in my taking up your name, I suppose—though Mr. Le Marchant is so uncommon particular who sees my master," muttered the servant, in an undertone. "You stand there," he added, sharply, as Lowry made a movement to cross the threshhold.

The servant slammed the door, leaving Lowry and Vivien standing on the step. The cold night air blew keenly on them, penetrating their thin garments and chilling them to the bone. Vivien looked anxiously in her father's weary face, and pressed his hand in silence. The walk had been long and tiring; Lowry felt faint and exhausted, but the touch of those fragile, childish fingers roused his failing courage and put new life into his worn body. He drew himself up with something of his former dignity of mien and waited for the answer to his message with outward composure, though his heart was heavy with a strong foreboding of evil to come.

The door opened again after a brief interval, and this time the servant addressed him with decent civility.

"My master is too ill to see you himself, but if your business can be told to a second person, and is very pressing, Mr. Le Marchant will see you."

Lowry hesitated.

"Did you give Mr. Dallas my name?" he inquired, eagerly.

"No, I have orders to give all messages to Mr. Le Marchant first."

"And did *he* send me that message?" said Lowry, bitterly.

"Of course he did," retorted the man, wondering at this shabby man's odd manner, "and very considerate of him too."

Lowry was determined not to take offense at the servant's insolent tone; he stood for a moment debating with himself whether to see Le Marchant, or wait for another opportunity when he might succeed in gaining access to Dallas himself.

The extreme urgency of his errand, however, decided him to take the former alternative.

"I will see Mr. Le Marchant," he said, briefly.

Lowry entered the house followed by Vivien. The servant ushered them into a small room on the ground floor —a plainly furnished but comfortable apartment, evidently used as a study. A large coal fire burned brightly in the grate, and the subdued light of a shaded reading-lamp shed a soft radiance on the few, but choice pictures on the walls, on the warm-hued curtains which draped the single window, on the tall book-cases filled with richly-bound volumes.

Lowry cast a rapid, comprehensive glance at these details. To Vivien's simple mind, the room was a perfect revelation of undreamed-of luxury. She gazed round her in speechless admiration.

Though outwardly composed, Lowry waited for Le Marchant's appearance with a strange conflict of feeling in his heart. Memory carried him back to the summer evening when Catherine had chosen between her love for him and her love for her father—between her lover and her inheritance. He wondered how time had sped with Le Marchant. Wealth and social standing had fallen to his share; he was doubtless looked up to by his inferiors and respected by his equals. The world had pronounced its verdict in Le Marchant's favor. He had prospered, thanks to his unscrupulous use of the blind confidence reposed in him by Dallas, while Lowry, with his high sense of honor and sensitive pride, had gone to the wall. Worse than that, he had dragged down to poverty the woman whose unselfish love had triumphed over every consideration of worldly wisdom.

A step outside in the passage roused Lowry from the memories of the past to the stern realities of the present. The door opened and Le Marchant entered the room. For a moment the two men gazed at each other in silence.

Fifteen years is a large slice out of a man's life. Time had left unmistakable traces of care on Le Marchant's face. The penetrating red-brown eyes were, however, unchanged; they looked out from under the broad, com-

manding brow with the same expression of mingled intensity and craft. His cheeks had sunk, dark rings surrounded his eyes, and two deep lines were traced on either side of his thin-lipped mouth; but his spare, well-knit frame was erect as of old, and the intense vitality, the wonderful nervous energy of the man was apparent in every movement—nay, in every look.

For once, however, his habitual self-command forsook him; a momentary contraction of the lips betrayed that emotion of some sort moved him.

Lowry had risen from his chair at the sound of the opening door, and stood pale, but composed, waiting for the other to speak.

Le Marchant's self-possession quickly returned; he looked inquiringly from Lowry to Vivien, and back again from Vivien to Lowry. He was evidently puzzled by the child's presence in the room.

Vivien did not to any great extent resemble either of her parents. The serious gaze of her large gray eyes, though it had a curiously disconcerting effect on Le Marchant, did not recall any memories of Catherine.

"You wished to see Mr. Dallas, the servant tells me," said he at length, speaking in his habitually quiet, even tones.

Lowry's face darkened at the sound of the well-remembered voice.

"Yes," he answered, briefly.

"Are you not aware that Mr. Dallas declined to have any communication with his daughter when she married you, in defiance of his commands? As *your* wife, she has practically forfeited all claim on her father. Any attempt at resuming her former relations with him will be useless. Mr. Dallas refuses to have any communication with his daughter—or her husband. I much regret that you should have thought proper to intrude yourself on his notice, and I can only add that nothing but my own consideration for my cousin prevented me from refusing you this interview."

The cool insolence of Le Marchant's tone and manner as he delivered himself of this speech stung Lowry be-

yond endurance. A red flush mounted to his forehead, which quickly faded to a livid pallor. He clinched his hands to keep down the furious anger boiling within him.

Le Marchant watched him with secret satisfaction. He longed to wound and torture the man who had won Catherine's heart; he delighted in rousing Lowry's impotent anger, while he retained perfect command over his own temper. The knowledge that, while the other was a prey to a thousand torturing thoughts, he asserted his superiority by a calmness and coolness of demeanor which, while it served his own ends, had the effect of irritating Lowry to make some hot-headed retort which would enable him to close the interview with credit to himself, and to his adversary's discomfiture.

Le Marchant, however, did not reckon on Lowry's power of self-repression. The thought of Catherine saved him from any rash outburst of anger which would place it in Le Marchant's power to turn him ignominiously from the house, with his mission unfulfilled.

"My object in intruding in Mr. Dallas' house," began Lowry, temperately, "was not to seek an interview with *you*. I come from Catherine with a message to her father. He will surely not refuse to hear it. My wife is ill—and—in great poverty," he added, with a painful effort, "or I should not make any appeal to Mr. Dallas' generosity."

Le Marchant's quick eyes glanced—as the servant's had—rapidly over Lowry's shabby attire, and his lip curled. Then he turned abruptly to where Vivien sat silently watching the scene with a puzzled expression on her young face.

"This child is—?" he queried, sharply scrutinizing Vivien's delicate beauty.

"Catherine's," said Lowry, quietly concluding the unfinished sentence.

"I suppose you thought the child would melt her grandfather's hard heart," said Le Marchant, with a sarcastic intonation.

"I did not for a moment suppose she would soften *yours*," retorted Lowry, quickly. "I know well whose

influence has induced Mr. Dallas to refuse all communication with his cruelly injured daughter," he added, bitterly.

"I presume that you allude to *me?*" sneered Le Marchant; "allow me to tell you that I am too careful of my uncle's interests—"

"And of your own," interpolated Lowry.

"Quite right. If you wish it, I will be still more explicit with you. I am too careful of my *own* interests to allow my uncle to be exposed to the unscrupulous arts of an adventurer like yourself—or to the whining appeals of an undutiful and disobedient daughter."

For the moment the innate cruelty of Le Marchant's nature showed itself. The temptation to taunt his rival in the hour of his humiliation was too powerful for him. It was not often that he allowed his baser qualities to appear on the smooth and urbane surface of his character. As it was, he felt half ashamed of his brutality as he saw a sudden look of repulsion cross Vivien's gentle little face. Poor as her parents were, the child had been tenderly reared, and she shrank sensitively at Le Marchant's heartless words.

Lowry's pride was too cruelly wounded for him to reply; he turned from Le Marchant in silent indignation, and, taking Vivien's hand in his, moved toward the door.

"Stay a moment," said Le Marchant, stretching out his hand to stop them; "I will not refuse you some pecuniary help—from my own purse, since my cousin is in actual want. But you must not make this a precedent for any future appeals either to Mr. Dallas or to me."

Le Marchant slowly drew his purse from his pocket, and, after some deliberation, held a couple of sovereigns out to Lowry with the magnanimous air of one performing an act of munificent generosity.

Lowry stared at him in speechless astonishment. Heartless as he knew Le Marchant to be, he had not thought him capable of this crowning insult. The pitiful smallness of the sum offered added a thousand-fold to the affront.

For the moment, his just indignation got the better of

prudence. He struck away the hand which held the sovereigns with a fierce and bitter oath, and hurried from the room and from the house.

CHAPTER V.

THE DARK ANGEL.

How far impulse may safely be trusted as a guide is a moot-point; but it undoubtedly rules many of our actions, and often determines the future course of our lives.

Tristram Lowry left the house in Brook Street, resolved to suffer anything, rather than again expose himself to Le Marchant's insults.

As he and Vivien turned from the house, the light of a street-lamp fell full on the child's pale, frightened face. He reproached himself bitterly for having allowed her to witness so painful a scene. Physical weakness, added to the severe mental strain of the past hour, had reduced him to the lowest ebb of despondency. Look where he would, he could see nothing but misery ahead. The future loomed, to his foreboding fancy, even blacker than it really was.

Had he been a man of energy and resource, the worst might yet have been averted. But Le Marchant's taunts had finished the work begun by poverty and misfortune. He left the house in Brook Street a broken-hearted, broken-spirited man, with but one dull thought in his mind —a yearning to lie down anywhere and let death come how it would; for, in whatever form it came, death would at least bring him relief from the hopeless misery of his lot. How far mere bodily exhaustion and fatigue influenced his state of mind, the learned may decide. A man need be a philosopher to endure hunger, cold, and disappointment with stoical indifference—and Tristram Lowry was no philosopher.

Ill, wretched, sick at heart, he was utterly unfitted to meet the new catastrophe which awaited him.

Lowry and Vivien, after a weary time, reached the street where they lived. They hurried past the few mean and dirty shops lit by flaring gas, where a crowd of slatternly women haggled over the fragments of coarse meat and stale fish exposed for sale.

More than one pair of eyes followed them, for many were familiar with the tall, thin, wasted figure of the broken-down artist, and many a woman's kind heart—and there were many kind hearts in that crowd of rough-headed, horny-handed women—softened toward Vivien, as they glanced at her pale, anxious little face, and saw how cold and weary she looked.

Lowry never raised his eyes from the pavement, but hurried along silent and absorbed. He was still brooding bitterly over the failure of his mission. How should he tell Catherine that their last hope had failed them? That torturing thought filled his mind to the exclusion of all other subjects as he reached the house. The front door stood open. The one small servant, who, in conjunction with the landlady, "did" the work of that crowded lodging-house, stood on the doorstep, with her arms akimbo, and her dirty cap half off her rough head. There were traces of recent tears on her dirt-begrimed cheeks, her eyelids were red, and there was an air of portentous solemnity about her manner. Something had evidently happened.

With a dim foreboding of the truth, Lowry brushed past the damsel without stopping to listen to the flood of words she was evidently about to pour out. He stumbled up the dark, narrow staircase with a half-dazed consciousness that the most crushing sorrow of his life was about to fall on his head. He reached the first landing, and paused a moment for breath.

There was a small oil-lamp burning on the landing, and by its flickering yellow flame Vivien saw an expression on her father's face she had never seen before.

"Papa," she said, in a terrified whisper, "don't look like that; you frighten me."

Her words brought him to his senses. He looked down at the child's white face, and tried to smile.

"Do I, Vivien?" he said, speaking slowly, and with extreme difficulty. "Come, let us go up to your mother; she must think we have been very long away."

Their rooms were almost at the top of the house, and Lowry toiled painfully up the steep, narrow stairs. His breath came in short, sobbing gasps; great beads of perspiration stood on his forehead; his eyes were wild and much dilated. When he reached the door of his wife's room, he paused again, and leaned against the rickety banister. The violence of his emotion had completely unnerved him. Before he had fully recovered himself, the door facing them opened abruptly, and Mrs. Clagett, their landlady, came out hurriedly.

"Oh, sir, I am so thankful you have come at last! Mrs. Lowry is took worse, poor dear, and—"

Here Mrs. Clagett, who was a short, stout woman, with a large, pale, unhealthy-looking face, paused for breath, and clasped both her fat hands on her broad bosom with that demonstrative exhibition of feeling characteristic of her class.

Mrs. Clagett was sincerely attached to her lodgers; for they gave little trouble, and, until the last few weeks, had always been punctual to the day in the settlement of her weekly bill. Yet she had a morbid pleasure in imparting the bad news. It gave her, what she loved above all things—importance.

Lowry was too stricken by this new trouble to heed the landlady's feelings. He brushed past her, and hurried into his wife's room.

Catherine was lying in her bed, her head propped up by pillows, to ease her labored breathing. One glance at her face told Lowry how much worse she was. She looked up eagerly, however, as he entered, and tried to raise herself in bed. But the effort was beyond her strength; she fell back half-fainting.

Lowry hurried to the bedside, and raised her in his arms.

"Tell me—" panted Catherine, "have you succeeded—? Did my father—?"

She stopped suddenly. Her eyes searched Tristram's

face. Her question was answered. Slowly the conviction forced itself upon her mind that his mission had failed—that they were, indeed, abandoned to their fate; left to struggle on, if they had the strength, or perish miserably, if they had not. A moan of anguish burst from the sick woman's pale lips, as she stretched out her arms and clasped her husband to her bosom.

"Oh, Tristram! . . . . I am cruelly punished. I have dragged you down to this misery. You were happy and prosperous, until—until—"

Here she broke down utterly. Violent sobs shook her emaciated frame, threatening to extinguish the faint spark of life which still lingered in her weak body.

Lowry vainly tried to soothe her. She clung to him with a frantic despair, terrifying in one usually so calm. She lavished on him the tenderest expressions of her love; she begged his forgiveness in tones that pierced his heart. In vain he assured her that her love had been the crowning happiness of his life; that her wifely devotion had cheered him through all their trials. She refused to be comforted, and, when the first violence of her grief subsided, she still wept on, with a quiet, hopeless sorrow that Lowry could neither console nor alleviate.

At last, utterly exhausted by the violence of her emotion, Catherine sank back on her pillows in a state of semi-unconsciousness. Her face was so white and so strangely still that Tristram's heart grew heavy with an awful dread as he bent over her. Trembling violently, he laid his hand on her heart. There was a slight pulsation, feeble and fluttering, indeed, but sufficient to assure him that life still lingered in that wasted frame.

"Vivien," whispered Lowry to the child, who sat silently watching them with great, wistful eyes, "your mother is asleep—tell Mrs. Clagett to keep the house as quiet as possible, and beg her to send some one for the doctor. I think the crisis is past now—this quiet sleep will completely restore her."

Vivien left the room to obey, and Lowry again resumed his seat at the bedside.

There are moments when the mind refuses to contem-

plate the stern realities of inevitable calamity. Such a moment had come to Tristram Lowry. He *would* not read aright the unmistakable signs of approaching death in Catherine's worn face. He clung to hope with desperation. His wife's life was so bound up in his own that his mind could not grasp the possibility of separation.

All through the night he sat by the bedside with her wasted hand in his, watching the pale face on the pillow with a painful intensity of gaze—it was as though he would keep watch and ward against Death itself.

The doctor, a busy, overworked man, had promised to look in early in the morning. Mrs. Clagett offered to share Tristram's vigil, but he declined, assuring her that "his wife was better—much better;" a bulletin which that lady heard with a dubious sniff, and an ominous shake of the head.

The slow hours dragged on in the shadowy chamber, lighted only by the flickering night-lamp, which, to Tristram's heated fancy, seemed to cast strange, formless, mocking shapes on the bare walls. Vivien had been dismissed soon after midnight to their small sitting-room, and bidden to go to rest on the shabby, hard sofa. But the child's brain was too full of thought, her quick ears too eagerly alert to catch any sound from the sick-room, for sleep to be a possibility. She lay broad awake all night thinking over the strange events of the day—events, to her childish mind, so full of new and startling experiences.

As she thought of her mother's passionate grief, as she pondered on the history of the past which she had heard from her father's lips on the previous evening, the quick sympathies underlying her reserved and somewhat passive exterior were fully aroused, while her quick imagination—that strange faculty which gives its possessor as much pain as pleasure—was set at work, filling in the details of her mother's story. For the first time she realized the extent of those early sorrows through which her parents had passed. To her ardent fancy the sweet, gentle mother she loved so passionately was raised to the dignity of a martyr.

Vivien was, as her father had said, in many ways a strange child. At that time her mind was a chaos of knowledge and ignorance. She read with avidity every book she came across; but she was almost absurdly deficient in much that is thought essential to a modern young lady's education.

Until poverty compelled them to remove to their present quarters, the Lowrys had occupied modest but comfortable lodgings over a second-hand book shop in a pleasanter part of town. Vivien's childish beauty and quick intelligence soon won the heart of the proprietor—a crabbed old man with a meek little wife—and she was allowed to wander at will through the dirty, dusty old rooms, filled from floor to ceiling with books of all sorts and sizes.

The child had an intense yearning after knowledge. Her imagination found ample food in the new world of books then opened to her. She spent hours among the faded, worm-eaten volumes, and, consequently, her childish brain was richly stocked with a strange collection of odd, out-of-the-way wisdom. She was not what is called a "bright child," that is to say, Nature had not gifted her with the sharp, superficial readiness which too often passes for cleverness, and the extraordinary amount of varied knowledge she had acquired during those long hours of reading was never suspected by those about her.

Neither Catherine nor Lowry ever probed the depths of their child's mind (how few parents do!), certainly they never guessed the dormant power that lay hidden there, waiting for Time to ripen and bring to full perfection.

From the day on which she heard her mother's history, a new era commenced in Vivien's life: she began to think, and to reason on the events which crowded thick upon her.

The visit to the house in Brook Street had made an indelible impression on her mind. For the first time she had seen the passions of Hate and Jealousy aroused. Le Marchant's powerful personality had impressed her with involuntary admiration, and yet with a strange, shrinking dislike she could not analyze. His cruel words to

her father had puzzled her, for Lowry had not told her of Le Marchant's aspirations to become his cousin's husband. Vivien was therefore at a loss to assign any adequate motive for his bitter enmity against them.

Lowry had explained his present position toward James Dallas, and had given avarice as the leading principle of Le Marchant's life; but Vivien, with the quick insight into human motives which she already possessed in an unusual degree, did not accept this as the true mainspring of his conduct. Instinct told her that some stronger feeling than self-interest prompted him.

Vivien had been deeply moved at the sight of her mother's anguish, but with instinctive tact she refrained from any open expression of her sympathy. She waited patiently until she could be of use, and had noiselessly busied herself in putting the sick-room in order, and in performing all the small household duties which now fell to her share. When she retired at last to her hard couch, her young frame was exhausted by bodily fatigue, but she was far too anxious to sleep, and the long hours of the night passed as slowly and heavily for her as for Tristram.

Daylight was struggling in at the windows when Catherine awoke.

The cold gray morning light fell on her wasted features, revealing plainly the havoc wrought by sorrow and illness.

As Tristram gazed on his wife's face, the veil dropped from his eyes—the false hopes which had hitherto buoyed him up fell from him one by one. At last the truth was made plain to him; at last he knew that the dread fiat had gone forth: his wife's moments on earth were numbered.

During the hours of darkness the gray shadow of the Death Angel's wing had swept over Catherine's wan face, leaving behind the nameless awful change which once seen can never be forgotten. The weary eyes, already dim and glazed with the mists of the Dark Valley, were turned wistfully toward him.

"Tristram—my husband—come to me," she panted, feebly.

With the instinctive awe which falls on all, even the most callous and least imaginative, in presence of the Great Unknown, Lowry knelt down by the bedside. Catherine held out her wasted hand, and the thin fingers closed round his with a tender, clinging touch.

"Kiss me, Tristram," she whispered, feebly; "I am going to leave you . . . My love . . . we have been very happy . . . it is hard . . . very hard . . . to part."

Lowry bent down and kissed her in silence. He could not speak; his lips were parched, a spasm clutched his throat. Vivien's quick ear caught the tones of her mother's voice; she entered the room on tiptoe, and silently crept to the other side of the bed. She wondered at the change in her mother's face. She had a dim, distant idea that something vague and mysterious was about to happen; that her pretty, gentle mother was going to leave them, never to return. Death was to Vivien only a vague abstraction; she had never been brought face to face with the Dark Angel till then.

Catherine looked round at the sound of a stifled sob from the child; she stretched out her other hand and laid it softly on the bowed head with its ruffled golden curls.

"Vivien," she said, in the same difficult, panting tones, "I am going to leave you. Be a good child . . . to your father . . . promise me to obey him . . . in all things."

The child's face was hidden in the bedclothes, but at the sound of her mother's voice she lifted her head and looked straight into the dying woman's face.

"I promise," she said, so earnestly that Lowry was roused from his own overwhelming grief. Even at that supreme moment the expression of intensity on Vivien's face startled him.

Catherine looked at the child's earnest face, at the clear, steadfast eyes shining out like stars from the shadowy darkness of the room, and a smile like a gleam of sunshine fluttered across her lips. Then she turned to her husband. The fixity of his gaze terrified her; she dreaded some wild outburst of grief.

"Tristram," she said, laying her hand tenderly on his, "when . . . when I am gone . . . try to be brave . . . for the child's sake."

Tristram was not a strong man either mentally or physically; he sank helplessly under this new sorrow. Burying his face in his hands, he burst into a flood of tears, and sobbed aloud. His manhood had utterly forsaken him.

"Oh! Tristram . . . try to bear it . . . " panted the poor wife, gazing first at him and then at Vivien.

The child seemed to understand her mother's thought; she resolutely choked back the sobs which rose in her throat, and crept to her father's side.

"Papa," she whispered, laying her hand lightly on his shoulder. "Papa!"

The word and the touch had a marvelous effect on Lowry; something of Vivien's wonderful power of self-control was communicated to him.

For one awful moment his reason had tottered; it seemed as if the "silver cord" would snap under the terrible mental strain. That wild outburst of weeping gave no relief to the anguish which gnawed him: but Vivien's voice and Vivien's touch calmed his frenzy, the gaze of her clear eyes dissipated the lurid mists which clouded his brain. He lifted his head and looked his child full in the face.

Vivien was deadly pale, but her eyes still looked steadily into his. All the strength and all the purity of her soul were called forth in that supreme moment; and not in vain. Lowry slowly rose from his knees, and stood erect before her. Outwardly, at least, he was composed. But there was no resignation in his heart. His soul was full of bitterness, full of rebellion; but he was no longer mad: he could think coherently and act calmly.

Catherine saw the change in him. She smiled, and tried to raise herself in bed. It was the last flickering of life in that feeble body. The awful moment was at hand. The difficult breathing grew yet more painful and labored; the gray shade on her face; the clammy moisture on her forehead, warned the watchers that the end was

near. The dying woman's breath was drawn slowly, slowly, like deep sighs, with long, agonized pauses between. Life was ebbing fast away.

But, on the very threshold of eternity, her spirit paused—her thoughts turned backward to earth.

"Tristram—my child—Vivien."

Her last breath was spent in the utterance of those words—and, with them, Catherine Lowry's gentle spirit fled.

CHAPTER VI.

VÆ VICTIS!

When great calamity falls on a human being, it will sometimes do much for the man or woman who suffers; for sorrow is a great, if not a popular educator. It ennobles and purifies a character that has any virility or power of endurance.

But Tristram Lowry's mind was singularly deficient in the patient strength that braces itself to face a crushing grief. He sank under his burden of sorrow without an effort. With Catherine his last hope died—life had lost its only incentive to continued struggle. He loved Vivien, but to him she seemed still only a child; and he never rightly understood her. He had little of the necessary penetration, and none of the sympathetic insight into character which would have enabled him to grasp the hidden depths of her nature. He suffered her to creep to his side, and wind her arms about his neck; but he listened to her words of comfort with half-stupid indifference. His brain felt numb. He could not clearly understand what she said. He only knew that she was whispering something about her mother; something about the promise she (Vivien) had made to love her father all her life.

Lowry stared vacantly at the child's white, frightened face, and then his eyes wandered away to the empty chair pushed aside in a corner—the chair where Catherine used to sit and work.

So the heavy days passed until after the funeral, and Lowry slowly realized that his wife's beloved presence was gone forever from his life.

During those strange, awful days, when Catherine's marble face, wearing the ineffable dignity and serenity of death, was not yet hidden from his sight, Tristram sat silent and tearless by his dead wife's side. For days he neither ate nor slept. Once only had he roused himself: when Vivien approached the coffin to lay a simple cross of snowdrops, given by Mrs. Clagett, on her mother's breast. As the child stood there, Tristram looked up, and fixed his wild, bloodshot eyes on her face.

"Child," he said, in a hoarse whisper, "remember *who* killed her— Some day you must avenge her death—remember."

His tones were low, but his eyes were full of such vindictive hate that Vivien shuddered, and looked away from him to the peaceful face of her dead mother.

Lowry's eyes followed Vivien's, but the heavenly serenity of that marble visage did not soothe his perturbed brain. He could not forgive the man who had been the indirect cause of her death. But, after that one outburst of the slumbering fire in his breast, Tristram sank back into his former state of hopeless, helpless misery.

The day after the funeral, however, he appeared to rouse himself; he suddenly rose from his chair and took up his hat.

"Are you going out, papa?" asked Vivien, timidly—"if so, may I go with you?"

"No."

The curt answer was uttered in a harder tone than Tristram had ever used toward her before, and Vivien's sensitive nature was wounded. Tears sprang to her eyes, but Lowry was too wrapped in his own bitter thoughts to heed them. Grief had made him selfish. Vivien had suffered acutely during the terrible days after her mother's death, but she suffered silently. No one guessed the intensity of her sorrow, for, child as she was, she bore her grief with a calm, uncomplaining heroism which roused the wonder of Mrs. Clagett and her satellites.

But Lowry's wild, rebellious anguish frightened her; she felt so helpless in the face of his silent, brooding misery. Her heart was very heavy as he turned and left the room without vouchsafing her another word. She listened to his slow, heavy footfall on the stairs, heard the door close behind him, and then for the first time a sense of utter loneliness and desolation conquered her brave spirit. She threw herself on the ground by her mother's chair, and burst into a passion of tears and sobs.

When he left the house, Lowry walked aimlessly on for some minutes without object or purpose: he only longed for air and movement as a relief to the thoughts which crowded his overwrought brain.

It was a raw, cold day, and the short afternoon was rapidly closing in. Tristram's coat was thin and threadbare, but he did not feel the chilling air; mental emotion had conquered mere physical sensation. A slight rain began to fall, but the miserable, haggard-faced man never paused in his rapid walk through the dismal streets. He trudged doggedly on, with bent head, and hands thrust deep in his pockets.

Now and again, as he passed a lighted gas-lamp, a passer-by stared wonderingly at his white face and wild bright eyes, but every one was too bent on his own pursuits, either of business or pleasure, to give more than a passing thought to the wretched, half-mad creature who flitted past in the winter dusk.

Indeed, the denizens of this huge, overgrown metropolitan city are pretty well hardened to such sights. Poverty and starvation, with their train of attendant horrors, are too well known among us. The rich and happy were too thoughtless to heed or even to note his woful plight, while those who had a personal acquaintance with want and crime were hardened into indifference. Why should *they* stretch forth a rescuing hand to one who was not one whit more wretched than themselves? What if their fellow-sufferer had once been a gentleman —for Lowry in the hour of his greatest misery never quite lost the look and manner of one gently born—was that a reason why he should be pitied? Was it not fair

that one of the hated class above them should know something of the bitterness of poverty, some of the slow tortures of starvation?

And so Tristram Lowry sped on to his doom, and no friendly hand was outstretched to save him.

He wandered on for some hours through the wretched streets of Lambeth and Southwark; he passed unmolested through many a rookery inhabited by the very dregs of the population, dens of iniquity where it was unsafe to venture without a couple of policemen. It seemed as if he would sound the deepest depths of human wretchedness, as if in the bitterness of his soul he would gaze on sufferings more cruel than his own, as if he derived a certain savage satisfaction in the contemplation of fallen and corrupt humanity.

Then he crossed Westminster Bridge, and bent his steps toward the more fashionable parts of town. His mood had changed; he wished to look once more on the scenes among which his happier days had been passed. Memory had wandered back to the careless, joyous life he had led in his student days—that bright period of youth when life seemed to promise so fair.

Lowry smiled to himself as he trudged along the familiar streets; he remembered as if it were yesterday the day on which he brought Catherine home to that tiny villa near the Regent's Park—the very ideal of a bridal home, with its climbing roses and ivy, its trim garden and shady veranda. How happy they had been there for a few brief months, before ill-luck and then misfortune befell them!

He sighed heavily, and the smile faded from his lips. Dark thoughts again took possession of his soul. Catherine was dead—dead for want of the comforts which money can buy. He ground his teeth together at the thought. He spoke Bernard Le Marchant's name aloud with a bitter imprecation. Had he crossed his enemy's path at that moment, the wild desperation, the mad thirst for vengeance which filled his soul would have prompted him to commit a crime. He hated Le Marchant with a fierce and bitter hatred; he longed to re-

venge Catherine's death; he would have taken Le Marchant's life without compunction or mercy in his present mood.

He clinched his hands in impotent fury; the sense of his utter powerlessness maddened him. Would the hour of reckoning ever come? Would a just God punish and avenge? Lowry walked on at random, muttering to himself as he went. He felt no weariness of body, though he had now been a-foot for many hours.

The heavy strokes of "Big Ben" telling out the hour of midnight fell on his ear, and roused him somewhat. He had unconsciously wandered back to the neighborhood of the river. The air blew coldly from the water—a bitter, chilling blast that made itself felt even to his blunted physical perceptions. He shivered slightly as he turned along the Embankment. He had no thought of seeking his home—*home*, the word had no signification for him now. The confinement of four walls would be intolerable to him in his present mood. The stillness and solitude of the broad, deserted thoroughfare soothed his fevered brain.

He crossed the road, leaned over the stone coping of the parapet, and gazed down at the dark, swiftly running stream. To his perturbed mind there was something lulling, something vaguely soothing and consolatory in the steady onward flow of the water. It was like a pleasant, friendly voice speaking to him in the silent darkness of the night.

He looked up at the sky. Not a star was visible—a dense, murky blackness covered the whole broad arch of heaven. But over London there hung a veil of blurred light, and the yellow sparks of the distant gas-lamps wound along the river bank in a long, undulating vista. Everything was black, misty, vague, except those specks of flame and that luminous haze.

Tristram looked up at the black sky for a moment, and then resumed his objectless wandering to and fro. Bodily weakness was asserting itself at last. The feverish, unnatural strength given him by the very poignancy of his mental suffering, suddenly gave way. He stumbled on

slowly and painfully until he reached Waterloo Bridge. Here he halted. A vague, half-formed idea flitted through his troubled brain. He knew that he ought to cross the river—some one awaited him on the other side, who, he could not remember. Who was it?

Lowry put his hand to his head and tried to think. No; it was useless; memory had given way under the terrible strain of the past week. Vivien's name—the very fact of her existence—had faded from his mind. That chapter of his life was a blank.

Catherine?—yes, he remembered Catherine. Perhaps it was she who awaited him on the other side of the river. He turned on to the bridge and walked some few paces; then he paused irresolutely. As he did so, the soothing murmur of the river again caught his ear—its low, monotonous voice had again a strangely soothing effect on him.

He went to the side of the bridge, and leaned over the parapet. There was no thought of self-destruction in his mind: he only wished to hear the musical ripple of the river as it ran swiftly on seaward—it soothed and at the same time fascinated him. Leaning both arms on the stone coping, he gazed down at the dark water.

To his heated fancy the indistinguishable murmur of sound had taken a voice—a meaning. The river was speaking to him. He listened—listened with straining ears and bated breath—to what it said:

"Here, in my bosom, is rest—rest—rest. Many have sought—and found it here!"

The wretched man repeated the words in a dreamy, half-frightened whisper. What did they mean?

"Rest—rest—rest," said the river.

Rest! he was very weary—he longed for rest! Could the river give it him?

He hung over the parapet listening to the luring voice. The words rest—rest—rest, were repeated over and over again in his burning brain. The river murmured them, too, with a rhythmic rise and fall, answering to the swirl and gurgle of the black water beneath the bridge.

Visions, dim and strange, floated before his eyes;

bright memories of the past; his cherished dreams of fame; Catherine in the flush of her young beauty—Catherine, the love and treasure of his heart; the happy years of their early married life passed before his mind's eye in a long succession of pictures, vivid as reality itself.

And still the river murmured its refrain, still the lulling ripple of the water against the stone arches seemed to sing a low, alluring song.

In the midst of the huge city, teeming with life, Lowry stood alone, with night and darkness around him, listening to the voice of the tempter.

Rest! Was not that what he needed most? He leaned wearily on the cold stone of the parapet, and rested his head on his arms; but he still listened to the river's song.

Suddenly an irresistible impulse seized him. He sprang on to the parapet, and stood erect on the stone-coping, a black figure against the dark sky. His wild, wide eyes were fixed on vacancy; his ears were strained to catch the sounds borne to him by the night wind; his arms outstretched as though he would grasp some vague, impalpable spirit-form.

The burden of the river's song had changed. As the water swirled onward, it called to him:

"Come—come—come."

And it seemed to him that it was Catherine's voice that called.

"Catherine! Catherine!"

The wind caught and carried away his wild cry, but it reached no human ear. A vision—bright and radiant as a dream of heaven—rose before him—a vision of Catherine. It smiled, it beckoned him.

There was a plunge, a half-smothered cry, a sullen plash—and the river swept rapidly onward to the sea, carrying its prey in its dark bosom.

BOOK THE SECOND.

LADY VILLEBOIS' PROTEGÉE.

I lived with visions for my company
Instead of men and women, years ago,
And found them gentle mates, nor thought to know
A sweeter music than they played to me.
—E. B. BROWNING.

CHAPTER I.

SYBIL LE MARCHANT.

THE village of Dalthorpe lay deep in the heart of one of the fairest Midland counties. It was one of the few spots within a radius of a hundred miles of the Modern Babylon in which the perfect quiet, the sleepy idleness of country life has been preserved, in spite of the inroad of steam and iron, which, during the past forty years, has changed not only the outward aspect of the country, but has effected a complete revolution in the social relations of its inhabitants.

The busy stream of life flowed past Dalthorpe without disturbing the even, placid calm of its every-day existence. Express trains dashed past the sleepy little station with a shrieking and roaring like mighty, panting monsters; but the mild-eyed rustics were oblivious of the busy, striving, struggling world which lay beyond their peaceful village. For the most part, they led simple, honest, industrious lives.

Of course, even in that small community, there was the usual leaven of dishonesty and petty lying common to human nature; but the majority were hardworking, upright folk, who sent their children to Sunday-school, and looked up to "th' passon" with becoming respect.

The village itself consisted of a long, irregular street, in which the houses lay far back from the road, each in

its own neat garden. These houses, or rather cottages, were well-built and drained, yet picturesque and home-like.

Squire Le Marchant was a good, if somewhat severe and masterful, landlord. He spent money freely, but judiciously, exacting the full amount of value for his outlay. Though not unpopular, he was, in a measure, looked upon as an interloper on the lands that had belonged to the Dallases from time immemorial; but Le Marchant was resolved to live down all such prejudice.

Since James Dallas' death five years ago, Le Marchant had taken up his residence permanently at Dallas Towers with his family. During those years he had done his best to win the good opinion of his neighbors. In this laudable endeavor he was most ably seconded by his wife and daughter, both of whom soon won the hearts of the villagers—the one by her gifts of coal and beef in winter-time, and sundry other seasonable charities, the other by the simple, unaffected interest she took in the people themselves. Mrs. Le Marchant's health was too delicate for her to take an active part in distributing the various good things which found their way to Dalthorpe from the Towers, and on her daughter, therefore, fell the *onus* of the work.

It was only by slow degrees, however, that Mr. Le Marchant won some meed of praise from his tenants.

In spite of James Dallas' notorious harshness toward his unhappy daughter—the story of whose sorrows was still talked of in the village by the sober, middle-aged people who remembered Catherine in the prime of her beauty—his memory was still beloved not only in Dalthorpe, but throughout Grasshire. When Bernard Le Marchant took possession of Dallas Towers, "the county" determined to cut him. But it soon got abroad that his wife was the youngest daughter of a peer—only a penniless, scampish Irish peer, it is true, but still the prefix of Honorable to Mrs. Le Marchant's name made her at least "knowable," and many of the most exclusive dames within driving distance of the Towers called on her forthwith. These tentative visits were in nearly every case

followed by invitations to dinner, for the new arrival was pronounced to be a most agreeable, ladylike woman —"not pretty, you know, but pleasant and well-bred."

This was the general verdict, and Mrs. Le Marchant was duly admitted, without further question, into the sacred inner circle of the best society in the county.

The master of Dallas Towers, though very far from being equally popular, was, thanks to his wife's tact, received everywhere with a certain show of cordiality. He had still the reputation of being "an adventurer" to live down, and he was secretly disliked by many. There had been ugly rumors of his share in Catherine Dallas' expulsion from her father's house, unpleasant whispers that it was entirely through his influence that James Dallas was induced to disinherit her; but, as the months and years went on, these rumors gradually died away, and, by the time Sybil had grown up to womanhood, her father was firmly established in the position of a country gentleman of large fortune, if not of ancient name.

Sybil was an only child, and, in the natural course of things, would be her father's sole heiress. She was, therefore, a most desirable match, and already scheming, anxious mothers with grown-up sons were on the alert to secure her for all the dances and tennis-parties which relieve, in a measure, the tedium of country-house life.

On the brilliant June morning when the reader is invited to make her acquaintance, Sybil was returning through the village to Dallas Towers after spending some hours among 'her people," as she loved to call them; for Sybil was quite a Lady Bountiful in her way, and the greater part of her pocket-money was spent in alleviating the very moderate amount of distress on her father's estate. A small basket hung on her arm; it was empty, the contents having been transferred to her various pensioners, and she held in her hand a bunch of homely flowers—a gift from one of her grateful villagers.

Appearances notwithstanding, she was not of the type of womanhood wrongly associated by many people with acts of charity. Let me hasten to say that she was not only young—eighteen at most—but singularly pretty to

boot. Most people have a very natural prepossession in favor of youth and beauty. Ugly worth may be very estimable, but it is an incontrovertible fact that a fair and youthful face readily influences us in its owner's favor.

How far Sybil's unbounded popularity in Dalthorpe was due to her charming face and winning manner it is impossible to say, but certainly a smile of recognition or a word of friendliness from Sybil was very highly valued by the villagers. Even old Ned Crake, the grave-digger, who was known as the surliest and most ungrateful old man in that part of the world, allowed his harsh features to relax in a grin of genuine admiration as she passed.

"I believe as Miss Sybil grows purtier every day," he growled out, following her graceful figure with his dim old eyes.

The love of the beautiful is not the exclusive possession of the man of education. Although his power of expression may be strictly limited, the unlettered hind may have a very keen appreciation of the supreme charm of feminine grace—perhaps, even, his rude nature may have greater capacities for wonder and admiration than that of the man of higher social standing, reared in the *nil admirari* school, whose shallow soul is incapable of honestly expressed admiration for any created thing.

Sybil Le Marchant certainly deserved old Ned's genuine, if not polished, eulogium. She was small and slight —her detractors would have said insignificant—in stature; but her figure was so rounded in outline and so perfectly proportioned that the beholder watched her supple, graceful movements with delight. Sybil's eyes were large, dark, and full of a wonderful dewy softness; they were perhaps the only really beautiful feature in the rosy, dimpled prettiness of her face. She had, too, an abundant quantity of curly brown hair, which defied all her efforts to keep it smooth and tidy. Hers was an eminently feminine type of prettiness; beautiful, in the strict sense of the word, she was not, for her small features were far from perfect; but she was, nevertheless, a very fair and lovable maiden; and right worthy of a

good man's love, for she had a very kind, gentle, womanly heart, full of pure and generous impulses.

It was a glorious summer day. The air was full of the subtle aroma of wild-roses and new-mown hay. High up in the unclouded blue sky the larks sang their clear, thrilling, gladsome songs "at heaven's gate." As Sybil's brown eyes followed the upward flight of the small, insignificant-looking bird, something within her responded to its song. She loved all country sights and sounds, but of all others she loved to watch a lark rise "from its moist cabinet" aloft into the sunny azure of the summer sky, and, flinging its rapturous notes around and about until the air throbbed to its melody, mount higher and higher until it became literally a "sightless song."

Sybil thought that soaring song the most beautiful music she had ever heard—it was so full of joy.

Her life had been as cloudless as that clear summer sky to which her eyes were then lifted. She had, hitherto, seen only the bright side of things, and her sympathies were all for happy sights and sounds. She had not sufficient imagination to realize all the sorrow and bitterness that lay outside the limited sphere in which her own life was passed. She knew, of course, that there were people in the world who were poor and unhappy, and even in such a quiet, orderly village as Dalthorpe there were stories of sin and sorrow which sometimes reached her ears; but poverty and crime were to her mere abstract ideas, she had no definite notion of the application of the words to the lives of men and women.

In Dalthorpe, if people were in great distress, especially in winter-time, help was always forthcoming from their richer neighbors; actual want was quite unknown.

When she watched the lark's upward flight, Sybil thought its song a fit emblem of all the joy and peace on earth rising to give thanks to the great Omnipotence above. She breathed a little sigh as she quickened her pace again; in her present mood she rather dreaded the ordeal of the formal luncheon at the Towers with her father and mother. She would infinitely have preferred dawdling away the afternoon in the park, but she knew

that rigid punctuality was the rule at Dallas Towers, and she dared not infringe the unwritten law which decreed that nothing short of actual illness should excuse the non-appearance at meals of any member of the family.

Bernard Le Marchant was a born autocrat, and his wife and daughter submitted to his iron rule without a murmur. Sybil stood in considerable awe of her father, and one of his cold, displeased glances made her both unhappy and afraid. She could not understand either his habitual taciturnity, or his love of solitude. Many a time she longed to win a loving word or smile from him, but he rarely unbent, and the poor child was fain to be content with a very limited amount of paternal tenderness.

Sybil looked at her watch, and, quickening her rapid walk to a run, sped through the entrance-gates and across the park with the lightness and fleetness of a deer, reaching the house just as the first luncheon-gong was clanging through the wide, echoing Gothic hall.

"Only five minutes to change my dress and smooth my hair," was her mental exclamation, as she ran upstairs and entered her own pretty suite of rooms. She dared not face her mother unless her toilet was of the freshest and her hair as smooth as its inherent curliness would permit.

She did not ring for her maid, but hurriedly threw off her hat and bustled about to such purpose that in less than five minutes she tripped down the wide staircase radiant in the freshest and crispest of muslin gowns, her bright, rippling brown hair gathered into a massive knot at the back of her shapely head; the only remaining trace of her rapid run being a slight deepening of the rose-tint on her dimpled cheeks.

Bernard Le Marchant, cold, hard, scheming man of the world as he was, could not repress a momentary thrill of fatherly pride as his eyes rested on his pretty daughter.

"You look unusually bright this morning, Sybil," he said, in a more gregarious tone than was usual with him.

Sybil smiled, showing as she did so a very perfect set of the smallest and pearliest teeth imaginable.

"She really is charmingly pretty," was Le Marchant's

mental comment on his daughter's appearance, as they sat down to luncheon.

Mrs. Le Marchant was a tall, slight, fair-haired woman, looking far younger than her age, which was in reality forty-five. She "owned to" thirty-eight, and people generally believed her, as she was one of those slim-waisted, delicate-featured blondes who retain a certain youthfulness of appearance far into middle-age. Her dress was always of the costliest description, and yet in perfect taste. In one thing, at least, Bernard Le Marchant was a model husband—he never grumbled at the length of his wife's milliner's bills, and that lady fully availed herself of his consideration.

What Selina Le Marchant's object in life would have been without the all-absorbing study of dress it is difficult to say. She simply lived for the "plaiting of hair and the putting on of apparel." Sybil was a very dutiful daughter, but, as she was not quite devoid of brains, she longed for something better than the eternal discussions on the changes of fashion, which formed the principal subject of Mrs. Le Marchant's conversation. She wearied of the everlasting topic of dress; the criticisms of Worth's latest *chef-d'œuvre;* the endless consultations over the cut of her own and her mother's gowns—in short, of the whole arcana of the divinity, Fashion, before whom so many women bow down in slavish adoration.

"Dear me, Sybil, how flushed you are," remarked Mrs. Le Marchant, in her slow, languid tones, as she glanced disapprovingly at her daughter's brilliant complexion. "You have been walking fast in the sun, as usual. When will you learn to take care of your complexion?"

"Never, mamma, I think," replied Sybil, laughing. "I am too fond of living out of doors."

"Complexion! Pshaw," sneered Le Marchant, with a contemptuous glance at his wife's delicate blonde face, which was not quite innocent of powder, "Sybil looks the picture of health. I, for one, don't admire your sickly, lackadaisical young women, who can't walk half a mile without making endless fuss—and yet can go

spinning round a ballroom for six or seven hours at a stretch, night after night, during a whole season."

Mrs. Le Marchant drew her thin lips together, but made no retort. She was used to her husband's frequent ebullitions of temper, and made it her invariable rule to bear his bitter speeches in silence. In the early years of her married life she had attempted to assert herself, but she had long ago relinquished all idea of holding her own in the matrimonial duet; and, as it is difficult to quarrel with a woman who keeps her temper and holds her tongue, Mr. and Mrs. Le Marchant were generally held to be a model couple.

Bernard was a politic man: before the world, and in society, he treated his wife with scrupulous politeness and consideration; and Selina was far too well-bred, as well as far too wise, to endanger her position in the county by any show of the rancor she secretly felt toward her husband. Indeed, her lot was not without its alleviations. Before her marriage, she had been one of a large family of daughters, and in those pre-nuptial days she had had but a very limited command of money wherewith to gratify her somewhat extravagant tastes; consequently she valued her present wealth to the fullest extent.

As has been already intimated, Le Marchant was lavish in money matters; and Selina accepted her gilded bondage with becoming resignation. Their marriage had been one of interest on both sides, and it was neither more nor less happy than such unions generally are. Bernard had gained a wife with the prefix of "Honorable" to her name, and thus secured an *entree* into society; and Selina had exchanged the poverty of her paternal home for luxury, wealth, and the enviable position of mistress of Dallas Towers.

"Have you given orders about the rooms I mentioned?" asked Mr. Le Marchant, abruptly, when luncheon was half over.

"Yes," replied his wife, in her quiet, even, emotionless tones; "I saw the housekeeper myself. What time do you expect Mr. Ormerod to arrive?"

Sybil looked up in some surprise. She had heard nothing of the expected advent of a guest, and visitors were not numerous at Dallas Towers. Her curiosity was aroused partly by the circumstance itself, partly by the unusual expression on her father's face.

Le Marchant glanced quickly at Sybil from under his dark, straight brows, and then turned to his wife.

"About five o'clock or so. Be in the drawing-room with Sybil to receive him."

Selina made a slight gesture of assent, and rose to leave the table, exchanging a rapid and significant glance with her husband as she glided gracefully from the room.

CHAPTER II.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

SYBIL followed her mother, wondering not a little what the new arrival would be like. In her quiet life a new face was an event, and her world was so small that she sometimes longed for a little variety, especially during those bright months of early summer, when most of the county people were in town for the season. Sybil was not to be presented until the next year, when she would be fairly launched on the frothy sea of London society. So far her sole dissipation had been an occasional carpet-dance, a tennis-party, or some such mild festivity.

The two ladies crossed the noble Gothic hall, and retired to the cool seclusion of the great drawing-room—a magnificent, many-windowed apartment running nearly the whole width of the *facade*—the very room that, twenty years ago, had been brightened by Catherine Dallas' girlish loveliness.

The room retained some portion of the furniture of that date, but when Selina Le Marchant came to the Towers as its mistress, she had effected a complete revolution in its arrangement and in all the minor points of decoration. She at once pronounced the brilliant-hued carpet—which,

twenty years since, had been considered a very marvel of beauty—to be in execrable taste, and as Bernard had every confidence in his wife's judgment in such matters, and allowed her *carte blanche* in monetary affairs, Mrs. Le Marchant had completely metamorphosed the drawing-room. It was now a model of æsthetic ornamentation.

Selina's good taste, however, made her retain the carved tables and curious Indian cabinets, the rare old china and priceless bronzes that had accumulated at Dallas Towers during the reign of its former owners. Those dead and gone Dallases must have been people of taste, judging from the heterogeneous collection of curiosities —the spoils of many climes and countries—which Mrs. Le Marchant had unearthed from various hidden receptacles, and scattered through the noble suite of rooms in which she loved to entertain her guests on the rare occasions when her husband and she entertained their friends at a formal dinner-party.

"Who is this Mr. Ormerod, mamma?" asked Sybil, when she had seated herself in her favorite low easy-chair, and taken up the elaborate piece of art-needlework with which she generally occupied the hours passed in Mrs. Le Marchant's society.

Sybil had a delightful nest of her own upstairs, where she retired when her mother's vapid conversation proved too much even for her dutiful affection. During certain hours of the afternoon, Selina required her daughter's presence in the drawing-room, and it must be confessed that Sybil thought those afternoon hours the most trying and wearisome in the twenty-four.

It was so difficult to find a topic outside the eternal one of dress that could rouse Mrs. Le Marchant's interest. She, therefore, seized on the subject of the expected guest as one likely to supply them with small-talk for that afternoon, at least.

"Mr. Ormerod is a friend of your father's," replied Mrs. Le Marchant, looking at Sybil's pretty face as she sat over her work, much as her husband had done when the expected visitor was first mentioned.

"I have never heard papa speak of him before. Is he

an old friend?" Sybil asked, looking up for an instant, and then dropping her eyes on her work.

"No. I believe your father only made his acquaintance during his last visit to town. But he has a very high opinion of Mr. Ormerod, and is anxious to show him every attention during his stay here," said Mrs. Le Marchant, with the air of one who repeats a lesson that has been carefully learned by rote. "Mr. Ormerod is considered a most promising young man in the political world, and your father takes a great interest in his future."

Sybil arched her dark eyebrows in some surprise. This extraordinary interest in a mere acquaintance surprised her not a little. Her father was not generally so willing to extend the hand of good-fellowship to strangers.

Sybil was silent for some minutes, and stitched away industriously at her work. Her mother watched her curiously from beneath her long, light eyelashes.

Mrs. Le Marchant's eyes were of a peculiarly pale-gray color, and their expression was often unpleasant, especially if she were vexed or angry, when they emitted a light, cold and chilling as steel, that suggested cruelty in their owner. They were neither cold nor cruel as they rested on Sybil's fresh, young face, only inquisitive and a little hard.

Selina's shallow, vain, egotistical soul was incapable of much maternal affection. When Sybil was a child, her mother had a certain fondness for her; she looked on her as a pretty plaything—an animated doll which she could dress according to the latest fashionable æsthetic craze, and who was scarcely on a higher level than her pet Maltese; but, as Sybil grew up to womanhood, her mother found her very much in the way; the girl's fresh, rosy beauty made her own faded charms seem even yet more *passés*.

Sybil was such an affectionate, simple-minded creature that she was often puzzled by her mother's capricious moods; she never guessed the true cause of those fits of irritability, and charitably put all such ebullitions of temper down to the chronic ill-health which was sup-

posed to be Mrs. Le Marchant's normal condition. It is true that nothing definite ever ailed that lady, but she was a prey to one of those problematical nervous maladies which must be alleviated by the constant use of a jeweled scent-bottle, by the easiest of sofas, and by the daintiest fare wherewith to tempt a singularly capricious appetite. In short, Mrs. Le Marchant, like many another woman who has little occupation or interest in life, was always in a state of semi-invalidism, except when some small excitement, in the way of a dinner-party or garden-party, miraculously cured her ailments.

During the course of that afternoon Mrs. Le Marchant and Sybil talked but little; the former seemed buried in her own thoughts, while Sybil plied her needle industriously, and let her fancies rove, like butterflies from flower to flower, over the possibilities and probabilities of the future which lay before her.

Mrs. Le Marchant glanced more than once at the small Sèvres clock near her. When it neared the hour of five, she rose languidly from her sofa and glided—her movements were always the perfection of studied grace—toward one of the windows commanding a view of the carriage drive. She listened for a few minutes, and then moved back to her place on the sofa.

"Sybil," she said, glancing rapidly at a large mirror opposite to ascertain that her own toilet was in perfect order, "put down your work—there really is no necessity for you to stitch away like a seamstress—and *do* smooth that rough, untidy hair of yours," she added, querulously. "I hear carriage-wheels on the drive. Mr. Ormerod will be here in less than five minutes."

CHAPTER III.

FELIX ORMEROD.

THE drawing-room door opened, and Mr. Le Marchant and his guest entered the room together, the master of Dallas Towers having paid Mr. Ormerod the unprece-

dented honor of driving over to the station—a distance of some two or three miles—to meet him.

The new arrival was duly presented to the two ladies, who each, according to her lights, rapidly formed her opinion of their guest.

"Decidedly a gentleman, and has far better manners than most young men of the present day," was Mrs. Le Marchant's verdict.

"Not exactly handsome, but has a face I like; I am sure he is very clever, and I think he is nice."

Such was Sybil's opinion of her father's guest, and, considerng the brevity of their acquaintance, it was a very just and comprehensive one.

Felix Ormerod was not handsome, though his face impressed the beholder with the latent power it indicated, and his talents were of a very high order. What that adjective "nice" exactly conveys to the feminine mind it is difficult to say, but if a singularly unembarrassed and courteous manner, a pleasant, musical, yet manly voice, and a bright smile constitute "nice"-ness, then Felix Ormerod certainly deserved the epithet. Much to Sybil's surprise, her father roused himself from his customary taciturnity, and talked with much earnestness and animation on political subjects. Mr. Ormerod listened with polite attention to all that fell from his host's lips; but his eyes wandered to Sybil's charming face, and he caught himself wishing more than once that he could escape from Mr. Le Marchant's eloquence. He would much rather have talked to pretty Sybil Le Marchant about the last new novel, or heard something of the quiet, uneventful life she led. Of late he had been living in an atmosphere of politics, and he secretly longed for a little relaxation—longed to unbend his mind from the high tension at which it had been maintained during the past few months.

Unless a man is thoroughly jaded with the cares of existence, there is a very real pleasure in studying a fresh, innocent, untutored mind—it is like a fair blank page, on which much may hereafter be written either of good or evil, but whose virgin whiteness is as yet unsullied.

As Mr. Le Marchant, however, seemed bent on treating his guest to a thorough exposition of his political views, Ormerod was fain to be content with watching Sybil's sweet face and graceful figure as she poured out the tea. Mrs. Le Marchant had long ago relinquished all active service of that kind, and certainly Sybil never appeared to better advantage than when presiding over her dainty tea-equipage.

Ormerod noted that she had very long curling lashes, and the prettiest imaginable dimple in her chin, and that the white hands which poured out his tea were slender and delicate, with rosy tips to the taper fingers. He thought her charmingly feminine—just such a soft-eyed, fresh-faced, lovable creature as a man might think himself fortunate to win for a wife.

Felix had his own theory on the subject of marriage. He did not believe at all in the much-talked-of equality of the sexes. His ideal woman was the preternaturally innocent, guileless, half-educated, and wholly confiding creature who has long been accepted as the type of feminine perfection, but who is, alas! rapidly dying out in this latter half of the nineteenth century.

It seemed to Felix—though their acquaintanceship was not yet an hour old, and he had had no opportunity of studying her closely—that Sybil was a charming specimen of this class. He was determined to seize the very first opportunity of drawing her out. But it was impossible to do this while Mr. Le Marchant plied him with questions as to his political faith, and it must be confessed that he was bored by his host's conversation.

Ormerod's ostensible object in coming to Dallas Towers had been to confer with its master on the prospects of his becoming a candidate for the representation of Compton Magna—a borough in which Le Marchant had considerable influence—at the next election. It was, therefore, somewhat inconsistent in him to be aggrieved at that gentleman's pertinacity in sounding him on political subjects.

Mrs. Le Marchant unconsciously became Ormerod's ally in silencing her husband's unusual loquacity. She

was determined to learn from the former how the London season was progressing; and she thirsted for some of the fashionable gossip she loved. It had been no small trial to her to vegetate in the country during that spring and early summer. She was resolved that her husband should no longer monopolize their guest's conversation.

"I feel so shut out from everything this year," she said plaintively; "my husband and I spent only a fortnight in town after Easter—and so little can be done in a fortnight."

Le Marchant thought, though he did not say so, that a great deal of money can be got through by a woman of his wife's expensive tastes, even in that brief period.

"Really, I am not very competent to give you much news," replied Ormerod. "I go but little into society, for I find it impossible to get through serious work after a night spent in the close atmosphere of a London drawing-room."

"Ah! I have heard you are quite a model to the frivolous young men of the present day," remarked Mrs. Le Marchant, suavely.

She was under the impression that this doubtful compliment would flatter her guest's vanity. She was mistaken. Ormerod had a horror of priggism, and hated the idea of ranking as a "model young man"—an epithet that would hardly exalt him in the estimation of the charming maiden with the brown curling locks and soft, dark eyes. He knew that much, at least, of feminine human nature. He laughed off his vexation, however, and turned to Sybil.

"You were not in town this season, Miss Le Marchant, I think?" he said, by way of a beginning.

"No," answered Sybil, shyly glancing up at him.

His eyes must have betrayed the interest he felt in her; for Sybil blushed vividly as they met hers.

"Sybil can scarcely be considered as 'out' yet," interrupted her mother, in a tone of vexation. "She will be presented next season."

"What a pity!" mentally ejaculated Ormerod. "This

delightfully fresh young mind will be spoiled at the end of it."

"I suppose Lady Axelby's parties were, as usual, a perfect marvel of extravagance and splendor?" said Mrs. Le Marchant, with unwonted eagerness. She was determined to hold her own in the conversation.

"Yes," answered Ormerod, laughing. "In a weak moment, I promised Sir Richard to look in for an hour—he knows I go out but little—and I paid dearly for my temerity. For four mortal hours I was so wedged in a mob of people that, unless I had literally fought my way out, it was impossible to escape. Shall I ever forget the unutterable misery I suffered! The rooms were so hot; the confusion of tongues rivaled that of the Tower of Babel—for you know Lady Axelby prides herself on her cosmopolitanism. Added to all this, our hostess had secured the presence of various 'lions,' who roared continuously for our delectation. I really think," pursued Ormerod, warming with his subject, "that, in these days of guilds and associations for the promotion of all sorts of praiseworthy objects, some one ought to start an Anti-Crowding League which shall oblige its members, first to calculate the number of people their rooms will hold comfortably, and then limit their invitations accordingly."

"A most brilliant idea," said Mrs. Le Marchant, seriously. "It would, at least, give one a chance of appearing to advantage. Under the present system of overcrowding, a really effective gown is quite thrown away. *Apropos* of crushes, Bernard," she continued, turning to her husband with the plaintive sweetness some people thought so charming, "*do* you remember that dreadful evening the season before last? You know Mrs. Asprey—the little American people raved about so?" again addressing herself to Ormerod, and using her fan vigorously, as if the remembrances she invoked were even yet too much for her delicate nerves.

"Yes; I remember her perfectly," answered Ormerod. "She was delightfully original, whatever her faults may have been."

"No doubt; but I cannot quite forgive her for that dreadful evening," said Selina, passing her hand across her forehead. The hand was remarkably white and small, and was loaded with rings. Mrs. Le Marchant's gestures were always effective. "You remember that season Mrs. Asprey had quite a small house in Mayfair?" she continued, in her low, drawling tones. "A house with several tiny rooms leading out of each other: the whole suite might perhaps hold a hundred people. Mrs. Asprey, however, determined to give an entertainment on a large scale; so she issued invitations to seven hundred people—I assure you I do not exaggerate. Five hundred of them accepted. Can you imagine the result? My husband and I never got beyond the foot of the staircase on that eventful night. Behind us were crowds of people desperately trying to fight their way past, and the staircase itself was hopelessly impassable. There we stood helpless. My dress was almost torn from my back; my husband vainly tried to extricate me. We heard afterward that the whole street was blocked with carriages, and that people sat in them for hours, and in the end were forced to go away without entering Mrs. Asprey's doors."

"Fortunately I was among the lucky two hundred who declined Mrs. Asprey's invitation," laughed Ormerod. "I should think she will carry the remembrance of that evening's entertainment with her to her grave."

"I know *I* shall," retorted Mrs. Le Marchant, sniffing languidly at her scent-bottle. "I hear that Mrs. Asprey was perfectly furious at the whole affair, and was so unreasonable that she declared she had been shamefully treated—that people blocked the staircase and *would* not move."

"Are all London parties like that?" asked Sybil, innocently. "If so, I am afraid I shan't enjoy them half so much as the carpet-dances we have here in Grasshire."

"There are some happy exceptions," replied Ormerod, kindly. "I don't wish to disillusion you, Miss Le Marchant, but London ballrooms are not all strewn with roses. I hope during your season in town that you will

meet Lady Villebois; she is, in my humble opinion, one of the most charming old ladies in the world, a real *grande dame;* she has her eccentricities, of course—as nearly all clever and original people have—but she has the kindest heart and brightest wit of any woman I know."

"I heard from a friend of mine that her latest craze is an unprecedented one; she has taken up some young woman of low birth, and adopted her as her daughter. Is there any truth in the rumor?" asked Mrs. Le Marchant, carelessly.

"I believe so," replied Ormerod, gravely, "and I hear that Lady Villebois' *protegee* is as gifted and well-bred as she is beautiful. People are quite enthusiastic about her. I have not yet been fortunate enough to see the young lady—she was not visible when I last called at Lady Villebois' delightful house at Chiswick."

"I can't say I believe in people of that sort," said Mrs. Le Marchant, contemptuously; it vexed her sorely to hear another woman praised; "they are generally sly and designing. I wonder where Lady Villebois picked up this particular specimen."

Ormerod frowned and bit his lip. Though he was personally unacquainted with the young lady in question, it jarred on him to hear her spoken of in that slighting manner.

Le Marchant, who felt somewhat bored by this frivolous talk, had risen from his chair and approached one of the open windows. He looked thoughtfully at the noble expanse of park, at the brilliant blue of the summer sky, at the stately avenue of beech-trees which led up to the house. Was he thinking of the strange caprice of Fortune that had made him master of those wide acres, of that ancient timber, of that luxurious house and the long rent roll of the Dallases? Or was he thinking of the one romance of his youth; of beautiful Catherine Dallas, the woman he had once loved so passionately; of the bitter enmity which had succeeded that love; of the years of ceaseless scheming; of the never-resting vigilance and anxiety which followed Catherine's expulsion from her father's house? Whatever the subject of his thoughts,

his quick ear caught the substance of Ormerod's words, and half unconsciously he listened to hear more.

Who shall explain the subtle instinct which prompted him to listen to a story that had apparently no connection with his fortunes?

"There are a dozen romantic stories going about," said Ormerod, after a moment's pause, during which Le Marchant left the window and again approached the group. "The one which is the most often repeated and the most generally believed is, that Lady Villebois discovered the young lady in some out-of-the-way quarter of town—at a second-hand book-shop, I believe. You know Lady Villebois' passion for rare editions? It was on one of these foraging expeditions that she discovered the wonderful beauty over whom London has gone mad."

"The daughter of the book-seller, I suppose?" remarked Mrs. Le Marchant, sardonically.

"No. The young lady is an orphan, I believe."

"Do tell me more about her," said Sybil, eagerly. She had been listening intently to the conversation, and her love of romance made her long to hear more about this beautiful, mysterious damsel.

"I am afraid I know little or nothing beyond what I have told you already," replied Ormerod, turning toward her and speaking in a softer tone.

"Cannot you tell me her name?" persisted Sybil. "I should like to know her when we go up to London."

"Nonsense, Sybil," interrupted Mrs. Le Marchant, peevishly. "I cannot allow you to associate with an adventuress, even if she *is* a *protegee* of Lady Villebois."

"Her name," said Felix, turning again to Sybil and purposely ignoring Mrs. Le Marchant's obvious displeasure—"I have heard her name once or twice, but it has slipped my memory."

Le Marchant came a step nearer and waited in an attitude of expectancy. A feeling stronger than curiosity prompted him to listen; a mysterious instinct warned him that Ormerod's next words would reveal something he vaguely dreaded to hear.

"Stay," added Felix, after a moment's hesitation, "now I have it. Her name is Lowry—Vivien Lowry."

CHAPTER IV.

SUMMER DAYS.

"I WONDER how it is that some people are so easy to talk to, while others make one feel so stupid?" said Sybil, innocently, gazing up into Ormerod's face as they slowly paced up and down the wide stone terrace looking westward across the park.

Ormerod had been some days at Dallas Towers, and he and Sybil were quite on the footing of old friends. From the first she had shown him by a hundred unconscious admissions how welcome his presence was to her. The girl was so entirely unsophisticated, so ignorant of the ways of the world, that she constantly betrayed the pleasure she felt in Ormerod's society in a manner that was highly gratifying to the latter's vanity, and at the same time intensified the interest he already felt in her.

"I suppose," replied Ormerod, smiling down at Sybil's thoughtful, upturned face, "it is an exemplification of the laws of attraction and repulsion." Then, seeing that she looked slightly puzzled, he continued, "Have you had much practical experience of unsympathetic people, Miss Le Marchant?—you speak feelingly."

Sybil blushed vividly, and her eyes sought the ground.

"I—I only spoke generally," she stammered, shyly, "although—"

"Yes," said Ormerod, gravely, as she paused. "I think I understand you. You have suffered from want of sympathy yourself."

"I—I did not say so," faltered Sybil, thinking she had gone too far. But the longing to explain her feelings conquered her timidity, and she continued: "I have no sister, and I have never had a girl-friend; perhaps that is why I have sometimes felt lonely at home."

"Poor child," thought Ormerod, with a sudden impulse of pity and tenderness; "it is not to be wondered at, with that overdressed piece of affectation for a mother, and such a block of granite as Bernard Le Marchant for a father!"

His keen, gray eyes softened as they rested on her downcast face; her lips were quivering slightly, and her long lashes were wet. There was a pathetic suggestion of feminine weakness and helplessness in her demeanor that was very attractive to a man of Ormerod's caliber. He took her hand and pressed it tenderly.

"And since I came have you felt lonely, Sybil?" he asked, in a low tone.

The impulse to express his sympathy for her was so strong that the words were spoken before he realized all they must imply. He had not intended to speak so plainly —yet. He feared that she would be alarmed, perhaps offended, by his precipitancy; their acquaintance was but a few days old.

Ever since the first evening of his stay at the Towers, a half-formed idea had been floating in Ormerod's mind that Sybil Le Marchant was just the innocent, confiding, tender-hearted being he could enshrine in his heart. The women it had been his fate to meet in society had little attraction for him; he saw so much in them that was meretricious, mean and heartless that he had set up for himself an ideal woman whom he worshiped in secret with a loyal devotion that would have astonished many people who knew Felix Ormerod only as the rising, ambitious young man whose future seemed to promise great things.

Now this ideal woman seemed to find a living entity in Sybil Le Marchant, and Ormerod's allegiance was transferred to her with a rapidity which startled and yet delighted him. The charm which Sybil had thrown over him at their first meeting strengthened day by day, and he willingly submitted to the new influence. The peculiar conditions under which his youth and early manhood had been passed, rendered him doubly susceptible to the charm of such an utterly guileless, unworldly nature as

Sybil's. He had no memories of a mother's or sister's love; and he had had no intimate friendship with women. His knowledge of men was extensive and varied, but of feminine human nature he knew very little.

Ormerod waited in some trepidation for Sybil's reply to his daring question. The color rushed to her face, she trembled and half withdrew her hand from his clasp; but when she gained courage to look up, when she met Ormerod's eyes fixed inquiringly on her face, her momentary shyness and agitation left her. She smiled; her large, soft eyes looked wistfully at him; but she did not speak.

The man who could gaze unmoved at that blushing, child-like face, at those wistful brown eyes, must have been flinty indeed. Ormerod was by no means insensible to its charm; far from it. But self-control was a habit with him; he restrained the sudden impulse which prompted him to clasp her in his arms.

"Sybil," he said, very gently, "I have known you a very short time—only a few days; but in those few days you have become very dear to me. Can you trust me with your future? Will you let me try to make your life happy?" The girl's head drooped suddenly, a rush of tears dimmed her eyes; a new, strange, trembling joy rose in her heart. She drew her hands away from Ormerod's clasp, and pressed them on her breast. It had all come so suddenly upon her: she half feared to analyze the feeling she had for this man—an utter stranger to her but one short week ago.

Ormerod read the hesitation in her face.

"I have spoken too soon," he said, gently. "Forgive me, Sybil. I spoke impulsively. Do not give me your answer now. I will wait for your decision patiently."

His voice stilled the agitation and trouble of mind into which she had again relapsed. All lingering doubt and hesitation vanished like mist before the sun. The full consciousness of her love burst on her with a suddenness that almost bewildered her. Her heart throbbed so loudly that she feared Ormerod would hear its wild pulsation. Joy—such joy as had never yet come to Sybil filled her

whole being with its bright effulgence. He loved her! What measureless content those three words conveyed to her mind! What had she done to deserve such happiness as this?

Ormerod gazed at her in silence. He had again possessed himself of her hand, and held it firmly in his own.

"Sybil, you have not spoken one word to me yet," he said, looking tenderly down at her sweet, changing face. "Tell me, at least, that I have not forfeited your regard."

"You have made me very happy," faltered Sybil, shyly. Then she blushed until her face rivaled the rosy glory of the sunset yonder. In truth, she was happy—perfectly, radiantly happy.

Le Marchant offered no opposition to his daughter's engagement. He had already contemplated such a possibility, and he was, therefore, not in the least surprised when Ormerod made his proposal in form for Miss Le Marchant's hand. He stipulated only that the marriage should not take place for some months.

"I have the highest opinion of you, Ormerod," said Le Marchant, with unwonted graciousness of manner, as they sat in the smoking-room after the ladies had retired for the night. "I shall trust Sybil's future to you with the greatest confidence; but, all things considered, it will be best to wait awhile. Why, a week ago you and Sybil were strangers!" he added, with a harsh laugh.

His manner grated on Felix. He felt a momentary feeling of repulsion against his proposed father-in-law. It struck him forcibly that care for Sybil's happiness was not the motive which prompted Le Marchant to accept him as a husband for his daughter.

Ormerod's acquaintance with the master of Dallas Towers had not been such as to give him a very exalted idea of that gentleman's character; but he felt chilled, and vaguely disappointed in him. He had expected that Le Marchant would abate something of the impassable reserve of his usual manner on such an occasion. But he was mistaken. Le Marchant listened to all he had to say on the subject of settlements with perfect politeness and

attention, but it was evident that he felt little interest in the subject.

"My daughter will inherit Dallas Towers at my death," he said, suddenly, when Ormerod had explained his own prospects—which were good, but not brilliant—at some length.

"I was not aware of it," said Ormerod, flushing hotly. "I thought the estate was entailed in the male line."

"No. Sybil will be my heiress."

"I hope you acquit me of any mercenary motive in proposing for Miss Le Marchant," said Felix, stiffly. He felt irritated by the other's manner. To do Ormerod justice, he was perfectly sincere in his professions of affection for Sybil, and it galled him beyond endurance to think that Le Marchant attributed his desire to make Sybil his wife merely to a cold and calculating greed for her broad acres.

"I brought no such accusation against you," retorted Le Marchant, coldly; "I merely mentioned the fact of Sybil's heiress-ship."

So the temporary unpleasantness between the two men passed away, and they were to all appearance good friends again; but Ormerod could not quite shake off the disagreeable impression made upon him by his host's occasional fits of moroseness.

In spite of some few drawbacks, time passed very pleasantly for Ormerod during those unclouded summer days he spent at Dallas Towers. The limits of his visit were considerably extended after his engagement to Sybil, and he gave himself up unreservedly to the charm of his young betrothed's society. Sybil's love seemed to fulfill every dream he had indulged in for years. He flattered himself that he had thoroughly sounded her character; it never struck him that this charming girl was perfectly incapable of sympathizing with, or even of comprehending, the ambition that was the keynote of his own character. The half-reverential awe with which she regarded him flattered his vanity. He could not doubt that she loved him, and he thought himself the happiest

of men. To have gained the love of so tender, so feminine, so winsome a being seemed the acme of bliss.

It was delightful, after a long day spent with Le Marchant at Compton Magna, after tedious consultations with the heads of the Party anent the forthcoming Election, to saunter on the wide terrace in the summer dusk and listen to Sybil's sweet voice as she prattled on about the small trivialities of her life. She told him the history of every one of the numerous pet animals, from pug-dogs to love-birds, she liked to have about her. Had she been less pretty, he might have thought this taste childish; but, as matters were, he accepted it as another proof of her gentle womanliness of character.

Sybil's love had brought an element of poetry into the uncompromising prose of his life: a new incentive to exertion was given.

Felix Ormerod was, and always had been, ambitious; not perhaps extravagantly so, but there was in him a deep and abiding desire to rise above his fellows, to win for himself a name and a place in the world. The small ambitions and petty cares of the ordinary ruck of men did not, never would, content him. The trivialities of a country gentleman's existence would not satisfy the needs of his active, stirring mind any more than would the empty frivolities, the meaningless shams, the mingled *ennui* and excitement of the life of a man of fashion. He longed for some wider area than that of a county clique, or than the small world of society; for some loftier aim than that of aspiring to the mastership of foxhounds, or to the making of a creditable speech at Election time; some nobler purpose than that of dressing in the height of fashion, lounging in club-windows and frittering away his life in a round of so-called pleasures.

It was this ambitious and higher self that remained unmoved by Sybil's influence. She dimly reverenced his talents; she admired her lover's distinguished if not handsome exterior; and she thoroughly appreciated his devotion to herself; but she had none of the quick intuition, none of the almost magical power of sympathy which some women possess. Sybil's intellect was nar-

row, her mind unformed to childishness—how should she understand the complex workings of a man's inner nature, the ambitious yearnings of a man's soul?

Ormerod had never yet met with a woman who could thus, by the magic of sympathy, penetrate the mere outer husk of his pleasant, courteous exterior, and reach the real, living, striving, ambitious core of his character. He did not believe that such a woman existed. Perhaps, just then, he would rather have the simple, unquestioning adoration of a girl like Sybil Le Marchant than the deeper, wiser love of a woman, who, while aware of his faults, would yet give him a lasting and faithful affection.

The hours spent in Sybil's society were hours of complete relaxation of mind; he need not trouble himself to unfold his best thoughts for her benefit; she was more than content with the crumbs he vouchsafed her from the rich stores of his intellect. A woman of higher mental caliber would not have been satisfied unless he had laid bare heart and mind before her; she would have accepted no half-homage. Sybil was humbly content with soft speeches and softer glances, with the thousand small attentions which, coming from one who was supposed to be singularly indifferent to feminine allurements, were doubly gratifying to her. Besides, she really loved Felix; she blushed and trembled when he touched her hand, her eyes followed him with the tender, trusting love of a child—and she was really charmingly pretty. Here lay her greatest power; her fresh, girlish beauty, though not of a very high order, had a wonderful charm for Ormerod, and, for the time being, he was completely under its spell.

CHAPTER V.

VIVIEN.

ROLLESTONE HOUSE was a long, low stone building of the semi-classic order of architecture in vogue during the earlier half of the last century. A wide stone terrace, on

which shrill-voiced, brilliant-hued peacocks strutted and swept in all the magnificence of their rainbow plumage, ran along the whole front of the house; a broad flight of steps led from this terrace to the garden, which was of considerable extent, and surrounded with high walls, that effectually shut out the prying eyes of the inhabitants of a mushroom-growth of villas which of late years has sprung up in the once rural suburb of Chiswick.

In spite of the near neighborhood of the metropolis, the grounds of Rollestone House were as secluded as a French convent garden, as cool and silent as some old-world cloister. A group of grandly majestic cedar-trees shaded a wide stretch of lawn, whose turf was soft as velvet to the tread. No gaudy mosaic of flower-beds marred the perfect smoothness and verdure of that lawn, for Lady Villebois—the charming mistress of that most charming of mansions, Rollestone House—held all scentless flowers in contempt, and abhorred all such vandalisms as "ribbon-borderings" and jam-tart arrangements, in which nothing is left to Nature, but where every leaf and blossom is stiff and studied, and utterly devoid of grace.

But she had a passion for roses, which she indulged to the full—her rosery was a triumph of horticulture—and she would suffer no rivals to her favorites. The rosery lay on the south side of the house, and the warm summer wind wafted the rich scent of countless blossoms across the lawn to where two ladies sat under the broad shade of the cedar-trees.

The elder, who lay back idly in a deep easy-chair of the bee-hive pattern, was a small, delicate-featured, white-haired woman. Age had set its mark on a face that had once been beautiful as that of the girl who sat at her feet; but age had not yet robbed the brightness from those clear blue eyes, nor the animation from those mobile features; nor had it quenched the bright wit, nor chilled the kindly heart of Mary, Lady Villebois, "the most charming woman in the world," as she was styled by the most ardent of her numerous admirers.

Her life had not been a happy one, yet through long

years of disappointment and sorrow she had kept a brave face to the world. Now, in her old age, a quiet, subdued happiness had come to her, just as a day of storm may be followed by an evening of tranquil peace and softened glory. At seventeen, Mary Rollestone, an heiress and a beauty, was married to a man some thirty years her senior, a selfish, heartless *roué*, utterly unworthy of her. Her domestic unhappiness was well known, yet the voice of scandal had never been lifted against her. Of adulation and flattery she had had her fill, but she passed unscathed through the fiery furnace of fashionable life. If temptation had ever assailed her, she had trampled it under foot, and held steadily on in the thorny paths along which Destiny drove her, with a quiet, uncomplaining heroism worthy of a martyr.

Fifteen years ago Lord Villebois died, having lived beyond the ordinary span of human existence, and his unhappy wife was, at last, freed from her bonds. To the last she was faithful to the vows she had taken in her careless youth. Lady Villebois was her husband's constant companion and nurse through years of ill-health, and finally of complete senility and helplessness, tending him with a gentle patience and wifely devotion which roused some gratitude even in the cynical, bitter, world-worn heart of her husband. He died blessing her, begging her forgiveness with his last breath, and the noble, tender-hearted woman felt she had not borne her long martyrdom in vain.

The world called her eccentric, as it generally does those who rise above the dead level of commonplace inanity, or dare to travel out of the limited circle of every-day existence. But, as she was extremely popular in society, such divergences from the beaten track were only received with a pitying smile or shrug of the shoulders as "one of dear Lady Villebois' whims."

The beautiful girl who sat at her feet, under the broad shade of the cedar-trees, was generally accepted as the latest exemplification of Lady Villebois' well-known eccentricity. But the bond of sympathy and affection which bound them so closely together made both indiffer-

ent to the charges of caprice and self-interest which the world brought against them respectively.

Lady Villebois' *protégée* was beautiful in no common degree; her features were cast in the purest Grecian mold; her complexion was wonderfully clear and transparent; her eyes, of great depth and expression, dark-gray in hue and fringed with long lashes, shone out from beneath a low arched brow of noble amplitude with a clear and steadfast gaze. The owner of such eyes must be incapable alike of untruthfulness or coquetry. The expression of the mouth—always the most characteristic feature in a woman's face—was singularly serene, almost child-like when in repose; it was, artistically speaking, a beautiful mouth, the lines of the lips were delicate yet softly curved, the tint of that beautiful healthful rose which paint can never imitate; yet there was an unmistakable look of decision about it that answered to the noble breadth of the brow and the steady gaze of the eyes. It was a face that compelled attention, that excited more than mere admiration for its beauty.

"Vivien," said Lady Villebois, gently laying her hand on the girl's shoulder, "since you came to me I have known something of the happiness a mother must feel."

There was a tone of wistfulness in her voice that made Vivien draw closer to her friend: she knew that her childlessness was one of the bitterest disappointments of Lady Villebois' life.

"I think," she pursued, glancing affectionately in the girl's face, "that a mysterious link of sympathy drew us together the first time we met in that dark, dusty old book-shop. How often have I blessed the chance which led me there! I felt that we were fated to influence each other in the future. Your friendship—your daily presence in my home, has brought sunshine into a life that has known little real brightness. *You* understand me, child, as no one has ever done. I can talk unreservedly to you without fear of being misunderstood."

"And I," said Vivien, looking up gratefully into the sweet, refined face of the elder lady, "feel that you have been the good angel of my life. I was not precisely un-

happy in that queer, dusty old shop, my time was too fully occupied—after all," she added, thoughtfully, "I think the secret of real contentment, if not of happiness, is in that prosaic thing—work."

"And yet," interrupted Lady Villebois, eagerly, "prosaic as it may be, work of any kind is nobler than stupid idleness. Vivien, when I think of the lives of some of the men and women round me, my heart aches. It is perfectly awful to see how many thousands spend their lives in a state of utter mental vacuity, and yet are intensely satisfied with themselves—nay, who think their own dense stupidity superior to the intelligence of others, for they are ignorant of their very ignorance. My child, believe me, your life even in that dismal back-shop was likely to be happier than if you had been reared among people whose brains have been dulled by centuries of idleness."

"What dreadful Radicalism!" said Vivien, laughing at her friend's diatribe against the order to which she belonged. "Lady Villebois, the very stones of that old house will cry out against you," she added, pointing with mock solemnity to the gray *facade* of Rollestone House.

"Ah, my child! I have outlived the narrow prejudices which would draw hard and fast lines between class and class. We of the upper strata of society ought to be ashamed that with all the advantages of education of which we have held the monopoly for centuries—happily it is so no longer—the great minds, those whose names will be remembered while the English tongue is spoken, have belonged, with but a few brilliant exceptions, to the middle and lower classes."

"But then you see genius is no respecter of persons—it is a very democrat," said Vivien, thoughtfully. "I often wonder," she added, after a moment's silence, "if Sir Thomas Lucy felt any mysterious premonitions when the future 'poet of all time' stood before him."

"My dear, depend upon it he was too full of his own importance to give the subject a thought."

"I have often pictured that scene," pursued Vivien; "can't you fancy the heaven-born genius that has made

hundreds of thousands laugh and weep; his great soul not yet awakened to its full power; his destiny yet unfulfilled, standing abashed, guilty and ashamed before that well-meaning, soulless pomposity, the country magistrate, whose name is only saved from oblivion by that very occurrence?"

"A homily to those inflated with pride of birth!" laughed Lady Villebois; then, after a moment's pause, she said, in a more serious tone, "Vivien, I have never yet asked you to tell me the history of your early life—don't tell me anything if it is painful to you to do so," she added, quickly, as the color rushed into Vivien's face and her sensitive lips quivered.

"It will not be painful to tell it to *you*," said the girl, very gently. "I have already told you that I lost both my parents when I was a child of fourteen; but I have never said that my mother—died of want"—her voice faltered slightly here—"and—a broken heart." She paused, and a sudden shadow crossed her clear brow. In a moment she had conquered the shrinking reluctance she felt to lay bare this old sorrow. In a low but calm voice, she continued, "My father, driven to desperation by overwhelming grief—took his own life—"

"My poor child," said Lady Villebois, tenderly drawing the girl's bowed head to her bosom, and smoothing her waving golden hair with a loving hand. "And you were left alone to fight your way through this hard, cruel world—at fourteen years old!"

"I found friends," rejoined Vivien, gently; "true and kind friends among those who, like myself, were poor and friendless. I had not a penny in the world—we were even in debt to our landlady—I knew I must work, or starve, or beg. I think, young as I was, my spirit rose to the emergency: poverty and sorrow had a bracing effect on my mind. I felt a certain pride of independence. I shrank from the idea of being a burden on any one. When my old friend at the second-hand book-stall heard of my forlorn condition, he came to me, and offered me a small wage, if I would help in arranging and cataloguing his books. I accepted his offer at once—eagerly,

gratefully; and for four years my life was spent in that dark little shop. I was not unhappy," she said, looking up thoughtfully through the dark, overarching boughs of the cedar-tree to the gleams of blue sky beyond. "I lived among the books; they were my friends, my companions. Through them, I had bright glimpses of the great world outside. In imagination, I roved through many climes. I visited bright Eastern lands; I talked with men and women of every race and every creed. I heard the old-world fables from their lips; I knew their lives, their very thoughts; I pictured their faces, their clothes, their gestures. Then my fancy carried me northward to the mysterious regions of ice and snow. I, too, explored those wide, rock-bound plains where night reigns for months. I watched the wonderful transformation which the brief Arctic summer brings. I seemed to see the rare flowers, the tiny mosses of that far-off land expand under the sun that shines for a day two months long. My body was in that dark, dusty little shop, but my soul, my real self had taken wing to brighter, stranger scenes. I was neither lonely nor unhappy."

Vivien spoke rapidly. A flush of color had stolen into her usually pale cheek; her large eyes dilated; her whole aspect changed under the influence of the memories she had invoked. She was living over again the dreams and fancies of her strange, solitary childhood.

Lady Villebois' artistic eyes dwelt on her with the quiet appreciative admiration with which she would have contemplated any perfect work of Nature or Art. When she was strongly moved, as now, Vivien Lowry was supremely, undeniably beautiful. There was about her a more enduring charm than the mere witchery of brilliant eyes, the fascination of winning smiles, or even of that "strong toil of grace" which surrounds some women with a subtle atmosphere of enchantment. The magical attraction which drew people to her had its origin, not in the mere charm of physical beauty, but in the power and striking originality of her mind, in the innate nobility and sincerity of her character.

Nature had dowered Vivien with the rare gift of elo-

quence, that wonderful power which sways the hearts of men with an impulse as resistless as that of the mighty storm-wind which bends to its will the forest-trees of the tropics—a force more inexplicable, more potent for good or ill than all the marvels revealed by science. It was a strange endowment for a woman, perhaps, but not an incredible one, as the page of history can tell. Surely Joan of Arc, Margaret of Anjou, Madame Roland possessed this power; and Shakespeare—that mirror of Humanity—has made Portia utter one of the most soul-moving speeches in the whole range of literature.

Modern civilization has all but crushed out the flame of feminine eloquence, save in the platform efforts of the "shrieking sisterhood," but now and again it bursts forth. Had Vivien Lowry been born in a clime nearer the sun and earlier in the century, she would have been worshiped as Corinne was worshiped; her beauty and her genius would have raised her to her rightful place as a heaven-born queen of men. In England her beauty was admired, the charm of her presence was acknowledged, the romantic story of her discovery by Lady Villebois roused interest, but her eager enthusiasm and her fervid love of all right and beautiful things were generally looked on with a cold, disapproving wonder; her eloquence was pronounced "odd"; the force and originality of her character were unappreciated, save by Lady Villebois and one or two others. Had she been less beautiful, had her manner been less winning, she would have been assigned the damning epithet "strong-minded," or classed among the blue-stockings.

"Dear child," said Lady Villebois, after a pause, during which her regard had rested on Vivien's glowing face, "you make me feel young again when I look at you. But tell me more about your early life, tell me about your parents—everything about you interests me deeply."

"My father was an artist," said Vivien; the color had died out of her face, and her voice sank to a grave, sad cadence. "He failed; his life was a hard and imbittered one, save for my mother's love. Ah! my mother, how well I remember her!—her sweet, bright face that al-

ways had a smile for me even when things were at their darkest; her low, tender voice that was like music to me; the touch of her loving hands. And her life was so soon ended—sorrow and suffering came so early to her! I have never told you my mother's story," Vivien went on, with a flash of anger in her deep-gray eyes. "She was cruelly wronged; her father disinherited her because she refused to give up the man she loved."

"He must have been a hard man—your grandfather, I mean," said Lady Villebois, thoughtfully.

"My grandfather!" repeated Vivien. "Ah, yes, the relationship had escaped me," she said, a little bitterly. "No, I believe he was only weak, the dupe of a crafty and unscrupulous man who was my parents' cruelest enemy—a man so heartless that he heaped upon my father the bitterest insults when he was all but crushed to the earth by sorrow and privation."

"Who was this man?" asked Lady Villebois, quickly.

"I do not know; there are missing links in the story my father told me a few days before his—end," said Vivien, with a deeper inflection of voice on the last word. The remembrance of her father's miserable fate was still very bitter to her; it was the one black cloud in her past that no amount of present sunshine could disperse. "I do not even know the name of the man who was my mother's evil genius, but I should know that dark, powerful, sarcastic face among a thousand. I have never forgotten it."

"What! you have seen this man?" exclaimed Lady Villebois, quickly.

"Yes, I saw him—once. It was the day before my mother died. We—my father and I—went to entreat forgiveness, to ask for help; we were in bitter poverty, my mother was dying of sheer want, or my father's pride would never have allowed him to beg for money."

"But this man's name—surely you have heard it?" said Lady Villebois, eagerly.

"I believe I must; but I was so agitated, so completely unnerved by that interview that I have forgotten it. Often I have tried to force myself to recall it," she went

on, pressing her hand to her forehead as though to compel memory to do her work, "but in vain. The events that followed were so terrible, so appalling, that my brain seems numbed when I try to carry recollection back to that time. All my efforts to remember our enemy's name have been futile; yet I think, if I heard it spoken—stay, I fancy it had a half-foreign sound."

"Do not worry yourself about it, my dear child," said Lady Villebois, soothingly, for she saw the painful mental effort Vivien was making to recall those long-past days of suffering; "be sure, whoever your mother's enemy was, Nemesis will follow him, and avenge her. I have a theory on the subject," she went on, drifting as usual out into the wide sea of speculative abstractions. "I believe all a man's sins and follies eventually find him out. Shakespeare never wrote a truer line than that,

'Thus the whirligig of Time brings about its revenges.'

Vivien, I feel sure your life's drama will not be played out without the appearance on the scene of this unknown enemy of your mother. Perhaps I am a fatalist to think so; people have applied that epithet to me among others. At least there is a certain amount of rough justice in my notion that evil-doers meet with punishment in this world. What if *you* should be fated to be the instrument of an avenging Providence—'

Where Lady Villebois' speculations would have carried her, had she had time to develop this last idea fully, it is impossible to say. Her philosophical disquisitions were abruptly cut short by the sudden appearance of her white-headed groom of the chambers—a venerable old man, who still kept his position in her household in spite of his age and growing infirmities—one of a class which is rapidly dying out: that of faithful, attached, and respected servitude.

"What is it now, Wilson?" said her ladyship, a little impatiently. "Oh! a visitor, I suppose," she added, catching sight of a card on the silver salver he held in his hand.

"Yes, m' lady," was the imperturbable reply.

"Mr. Felix Ormerod," said Lady Villebois, reading the card through her gold-rimmed eye-glasses. "Show him here, Wilson. It is a shame to sit indoors on such a day as this," she added, turning to Vivien, "and I should think any sensible man would prefer that stretch of blue sky and the cool shadow of this cedar-tree to my drawing-room."

Vivien smiled her assent, and rose from her lowly position at her friend's feet. As she moved, a sunbeam darted through the thick branches of the cedar and illumined her face and hair with a radiant halo of intense light. Lady Villebois glanced at her quickly; Vivien's beauty struck her anew with wonder and admiration: the tall, stately figure, fully developed yet graceful and willowy in every movement, standing out against the dark background of the cedar-trunk; that sun-ray just touching the white forehead and golden hair; the look of intense earnestness in the gray eyes, made a picture worth looking at. There was an almost solemn hush about the scene; the golden afternoon light slumbered on the vivid emerald of the wide lawn, on the warmer hue of a group of copper-beech-trees, on the distant brilliance of color from the rose-garden.

Neither spoke; both were of that sensitive, highly-strung organization which is so quick to feel any new impending influence. In Vivien this strange faculty of prescience almost amounted to a sixth sense. As she waited there under the dusky shade of the giant cedar-tree, a curious foreboding was upon her; she shrank from meeting this stranger, though she would have found it impossible to account for the existence of the feeling. A premonition rushed over her that a new phase of her life was about to commence; that that hot, still, balmy afternoon was destined to mark an epoch in the story of her fate.

Lady Villebois looked at her again; she was accustomed to read every passing emotion in the girl's expressive face, but for once she failed to comprehend her favorite's mood—though some magnetic power of sympathy made her vaguely uneasy and anxious on her behalf.

The sound of approaching footsteps roused both from the half-dreamy state into which they had fallen. Vivien's habitual serenity returned to her, and Lady Villebois was her vivacious, brilliant and charming self again before Felix Ormerod had crossed the stretch of emerald turf to where the two laides sat.

CHAPTER VI.

UNDER THE CEDARS.

ORMEROD'S unlooked-for appearance at Rollestone House was the result of a conversation between Sybil and himself on the evening previous to his departure from Dallas Towers. Vivien Lowry's romantic story had aroused something deeper and stronger than mere curiosity in Sybil's breast. More than once she had questioned her betrothed on the subject, and she openly expressed her disappointment when Ormerod told her that he had nothing to impart beyond what she already knew. Sybil, however, was not to be thus easily baffled; she had set her heart on clearing up the mystery which shrouded the past history of Lady Villebois' *protégée.* Hers was an essentially emotional nature. In her childhood she had delighted in fairy tales; bare facts were distasteful, unless robed in a dress of fascinating romance. Her life had hitherto been singularly devoid of exciting incidents, and she longed for a closer acquaintance with one whose experiences of life must be so different from her own. Thus it was that she begged Ormerod to pay an early visit to Rollestone House and pave the way for her introduction to Lady Villebois and Vivien later on. Ormerod had promised to do so, and, as the day succeeding his return to town was particularly fine, he decided to ride out to Chiswick the same afternoon.

"My dear Mr. Ormerod, I am delighted to see you again," said Lady Villebois, holding out her hand as he

approached. "I thought you had forgotten your way to Chiswick."

Ormerod shook hands and glanced quickly at the tall, white-clad figure standing behind Lady Villebois' chair.

"I don't think you have met Miss Lowry before," said that lady, brightly. "Vivien, my dear, this is Mr. Felix Ormerod—a gentleman who was formerly one of my most frequent visitors, but who has lately taken to politics, and consequently has neglected me shamefully."

"I am afraid I must cry *meâ culpâ*," said Felix, bowing to Vivien. "Miss Lowry, will you plead for me?"

The embarrassment which both had momentarily felt soon vanished, for Vivien was naturally of a serene temper and Ormerod was too well versed in the ways of society to allow any emotion to appear on the surface.

"I have been away—in Grasshire," he continued; "indeed, I only returned last night. My first visit has been to you, Lady Villebois, so I think you must acquit me of any willful neglect."

"I find a verdict of 'not guilty,'" she replied, laughing. "What induced you to run away from town during the season? Grasshire must hold some great attraction, surely, to wean you from the pursuit of what the world —perhaps in satire—calls pleasure."

"My errand was partly of a political nature," said Ormerod, flushing slightly; "one of the county magnates in that part of the world has promised me his influence at the next election."

"You intend to become a candidate for a seat in Parliament," laughed Lady Villebois, holding up her hands in mock horror. "Oh, most deluded young man! Are you fired with the ambition of 'commanding the applause of listening senates'?"

"Again I must say *meâ culpâ*," said Felix, smiling; "such is my intention. I am to solicit the suffrages of the free and independent electors of Compton Magna when the present member retires."

"And your politics?"

"Are moderately Conservative."

"Moderately Conservative!" repeated her ladyship,

slowly; "let me think what that means—I was reared in the old-fashioned school of Toryism, before the word Conservative was coined. What my present convictions are I scarcely dare say; but when I see the vice, the misery, the abject poverty in this great, overcrowded metropolis of ours, I am tempted to become a Red Republican—a Nihilist—anything!"

Ormerod smiled at this tirade; he was not shocked, not even surprised at her vehemence; he knew, none better, how kind, how noble, how gentle was the heart of the eccentric old lady whose oddities of speech and manner the world so often misunderstood.

"I think my political creed is in all vital points that of the man I hope one day to call my political leader—Beaconsfield."

"A great man," said Lady Villebois, concisely.

"There, at least, we can agree," responded Ormerod, warmly. "Are you interested in politics, Miss Lowry?" he asked, suddenly turning to Vivien, who had been silently listening to the conversation.

"That is rather a difficult question to answer," she replied, gravely. "I know so little about the subject. I should certainly be puzzled to define my political creed; but I suppose all parties have the same object in view—the good of the community and the best welfare of the people—"

"Ah, but," interrupted Lady Villebois, quickly, "the great question is, what *is* the greatest good for them. Some think education is to be the panacea for all ills."

"But that will not save men and women from starvation," replied Vivien, gently; "no one values the blessing of education more than I, but—"

"Ah, there is always a but; that is one of the ills of this unsatisfactory world of ours," put in Lady Villebois, sighing.

"What is your theory of the greatest good?" asked Ormerod of Vivien, as she paused thoughtfully.

He felt an irresistible desire to learn more of the hidden workings of a mind that he felt to be, for him, a new chapter in the book of human character—a totally unex-

pected development of a type of womanhood which he had hitherto had little opportunity of studying. He looked inquiringly at the beautiful, serious face of this very odd young lady; at her clear, earnest eyes, at her firm yet delicate mouth: "Surely nothing ill could dwell in such a temple," he thought, as he waited for her answer.

"My theories of life are little better than dreams," she said at length, speaking in very quiet and yet earnest tones; "perhaps—nay, I am almost certain they could not be thoroughly carried out. Most people would think them utterly and ridiculously impracticable."

"Let us hear them, nevertheless," said Lady Villebois, who loved to draw her favorite out.

The color deepened in Vivien's cheek. Her life hitherto had been solitary and secluded; and she was sensitively alive to ridicule. There was a slightly satiric curve in this young man's lips which intimated that sarcasm was not absent from his disposition. But Vivien's convictions, young as she was, were so deeply rooted, her enthusiasm for the cause she had at heart was so warm, that, as she thought of all the misery, all the sin and wretchedness and suffering of millions of toiling, striving men and women—the People—the humble rank and file of the great army of Humanity, all thought of self vanished, and with it all her shyness and reserve.

"I would have the rich and poor brought nearer together—the bond of their common brotherhood strengthened. The happy, wealthy, educated Few should make their superiority in rank—and all that is the consequence of that superiority—but the means to an end: the rescue from untold degradation of the unhappy, poverty-stricken Many. It seems to me that the cruel barriers which now exist between the higher and lower classes are a standing reproach to our Christianity. I would throw down these barriers; I would bridge over the chasm which separates the rich man from his poorer brother. I would have them learn from each other. Believe me, I have lived among the people, and I know their many good and noble qualities. The rich man would learn many useful

lessons from those the world holds so immeasurably beneath him: he would find much to admire, much to emulate—"

"Hold! Enough—enough!" cried Lady Villebois, with assumed horror. "Mr. Ormerod's 'moderate Conservatism' must have received a shock from which it will never recover. If I allow you to go on, he will become a convert to this most unorthodox political creed of yours—if creed it can be called. The free and independent electors of Compton Magna will be scandalized by the views of their candidate. A cry will go up to heaven that the country is in danger; that the foundations of the glorious British Constitution are being undermined. In short, that a general upheaval of society is at hand. My dear child, you have given utterance to sentiments that absolutely appall me—you describe a Red Republican Utopia."

"I warned you that my theories of life were visionary; but are they as impracticable as they seem?" said Vivien, the eager light in whose eyes had not yet faded; for, as usual, she had forgotten mere conventionality of phrase and manner in the overmastering emotion of the moment. She felt deeply, and she spoke out of the fullness of her heart. Her cheeks were flushed; her eyes shone; her voice had a thrill of intense feeling.

Ormerod gazed at her wonderingly. This beautiful, impassioned woman, whose deep-gray eyes had in them the light of inspiration, was an utterly new revelation to him. He caught the infection of her enthusiasm. He, Felix Ormerod—who prided himself on the perfection of his self-mastery—felt the warm color mount to his cheeks, and a strange glow of emotion fill his heart.

"Your theories are not impossible, nor even impracticable, if men would free their minds from the traditions of the past, and be content to liye and act in the light of present-day progress."

"A convert—a convert!" cried Lady Villebois, exultingly. "Vivien, my dear, that eloquent tongue of yours has worked a miracle! Do you know that this young man is considered one of the rising lights of 'Young Eng-

land?' That a possible future Prime Minister is hidden under this quiet exterior?"

"Oh, Lady Villebois! you are pleased to be satirical now," retorted Ormerod, smiling. "Miss Lowry," he added, turning to Vivien, and speaking in a graver tone, "believe me, that the party to which I have the honor to belong have tried to solve what is one of the most difficult problems of the present day—the amelioration of the condition of our poorer brethren, and the closer union of classes."

"I am glad to hear it," said Lady Villebois, quickly. "As I told you I was reared in the school of rigid Toryism, but now I number myself among the free-lances; such a position suits me exactly—suits my 'irresponsible frivolity' of mind, to quote our dear Dizzy, for whose talents I have the deepest admiration and the most complete respect. I like the liberty to criticise or sympathize with all parties; I should hate the narrow limits of a party creed. But enough of generalities, Mr. Ormerod," she added, smiling; "I am really interested to know how you fared with the good people of Compton Magna. I know something of that part of the world—indeed, I have a small property some four or five miles from the town, but I rarely visit it. What say you, Vivien shall we enliven the dullness of Grasshire by a flying visit this autumn?'

Lady Villebois looked inquiringly at her favorite; then, without waiting for an answer, resumed:

"Shal' we canvass for you, Mr. Ormerod? I used to be an adept in the art—ah, how many years ago!" she added, with sudden gravity.

"I am sure Time has not altered you in that respect," said Ormerod, gallantly; "but are you serious, Lady Villebois? Will you really go down to Grasshire this autumn?"

There was an eager tone in his voice that startled her somewhat; it was so utterly unlike the quiet indifference of his usual speech. She looked at him keenly.

"Perhaps," she said, thoughtfully; "my movements

are always uncertain. Vivien, what do *you* say?" she added, with another inquiring glance.

Vivien had suddenly grown pale; there was a troubled look in her eyes, and the hand which rested on Lady Villebois' chair trembled visibly. Another of those strange, warning presentiments, vague, intangible as morning mist, had flashed across her brain. What did it mean? The proposed visit seemed a thing of no importance, a trivial incident in the even tenor of her life—how could it influence her future?

"It shall be just as you like, Vivien," said Lady Villebois, gently; for the second time that day she had failed to understand the girl's mood; "you shall decide whether we spend the autumn in Grasshire or go abroad—to Rome, Florence, Naples—where you will."

Ormerod waited almost breathlessly for Vivien's decision; he felt a sudden, unaccountable desire that the two ladies should elect to visit Grasshire. He did not stop to analyze the feeling which prompted the wish, for he was not much given to mental introspection.

Perhaps the intensity of his desire influenced Vivien.

"We will go to Compton Magna, if you wish it, Lady Villebois," she said, quietly. "I have seen so little of my own country; most of my life has been 'in populous city pent,' and I have heard you say that England is the most beautiful country in the world."

"Do not quote me against myself, Vivien," said Lady Villebois, deprecatingly. "I know that such an opinion is rank heresy, but I do confess to a love for the greenness that rests town-wearied eyes, the quiet charm of rural scenery, only to be found in perfection in England."

"Then it is settled that you go down to Grasshire this autumn?" said Ormerod, pleased at the gratification of his wish; he was a man who hated even trivial failures. "Though I have but lately paid a visit to Compton Magna, I must plead ignorance of a great deal of its vicinage. What is the name of your place, Lady Villebois?"

"Mordaunt's Rest,' she replied, drawing her lace shawl about her shoulders, and rising from her chair. "Come, Mr. Ormerod, shall we stroll through the rosery? You

will stay to dinner, of course—that is, if you have no other engagement," she added, smiling.

"I shall be very happy," said Ormerod, "if you will excuse morning dress."

"Certainly."

The three moved away from the deep shade of the cedar-tree across the smooth expanse of lawn. The sun no longer beat down with the intensity of an hour or two since; a cool breeze had sprung up, a sense of reviving freshness was about, the faint, resinous odor of the cedars mingled with the richer scent of roses, the air was so transparent that the colors of the flowers seemed indued with new brilliancy, and the outlines of the copper-beech-trees stood out with marvelous distinctness against the deep-blue sky.

"What a glorious evening!" exclaimed Ormerod.

He was not usually keenly alive to the beauties of Nature, but this evening the golden glow of sunlight and the delicious balmy softness of the air struck him with a sudden sensation of pleasure. As they ascended to the terrace, Lady Villebois again turned the conversation to the subject of the proposed visit to Grasshire.

"You never chanced on Mordaunt's Rest, I suppose, during your rides?" she asked suddenly of Ormerod. "It is sadly neglected, I fear. I have not visited it for years. This is my real *home*," she added, pausing at the top of the steps, and turning to survey the charming scene before her.

"Rollestone House is 'dead perfection,'" said Felix, looking across the sunlit garden to the giant cedar standing dark, and somber, and majestic against the golden glory of the western sky.

They stood silently for some moments; the thoughts of each were pre-occupied. Lady Villebois was pondering over some of the long past scenes in her own life—scenes enacted among associations which differed widely from those which now surrounded her. The mention of her Grasshire property had opened an old wound in her heart; some of the bitterest hours of her life had been lived through at Mordaunt's Rest. There the early years of

her married life had been passed; there she had been rudely awakened from her dream of happiness; there she had discovered the utter worthlessness of the man she had sworn to honor and obey until death parted them; there all her hopes of domestic peace had been rudely dashed to the ground.

Ormerod's thoughts were occupied with the future; the conversation under the shade of the cedar-tree had inaugurated a new phase in his life. Vivien Lowry's rare beauty had roused him to unwonted admiration; her voice, the peculiar expression of intensity on her face, her enthusiasm for the cause she had at heart, woke feelings he had never yet experienced. In her presence all his former theories on the subject of woman's rightful place melted into thin air. This girl was so feminine and so winning; no trace of the masterfulness, the loud-voiced self-assertion the arrogant assumption of superiority he had hitherto associated with mental power in woman disfigured the gentle serenity and sweetness of her manner. He acknowledged her beauty, he felt the charm of her presence, but he scarcely realized the extent of the influence she had already acquired over him.

Already a dim, shadowy doubt crossed his mind whether Sybil Le Marchant, gentle and lovable as she was, altogether fulfilled his ideal; already he mentally compared her with Vivien. Was not Sybil somewhat childish and shallow? He checked the half-formed thought as a disloyalty to his betrothed, but the mere consciousness that he had compared the two girls gave a tinge of embarrassment to his manner for the rest of the evening.

Vivien, on the contrary, entirely regained her composure; the momentary disturbance of her calmness left no outward trace behind it. She talked to Ormerod with earnestness—it was not her nature to be indifferent—but she did not again touch on any of the subjects on which she felt most strongly. There was a certain latent reserve in her character that forbade her to reveal her thoughts except on rare occasions, and then only to those with whom she felt in sympathy. As yet her feeling for

Ormerod was undefined. She hardly knew whether she liked, or only admired him. Admire him she certainly did—there was a certain quiet power about him which commanded her admiration; but there was a certain hardness, almost harshness about him which repelled her. She could not yet decide whether this hardness was only on the surface, or whether it actually amounted to a defect of character. Though her sphere of observation had hitherto been very limited, she was accustomed to study closely those with whom she was brought in contact; and Felix Ormerod's character interested her extremely. She thought of him a great deal during the few days following his visit to Rollestone House, but without arriving at any definite conclusion about him. When Lady Villebois sang his praises, she listened but made no remark, and when that lively lady asked her point-blank what she thought of her "Future Prime Minister," Vivien laughed and declared "that she begged to reserve her opinion—a future Prime Minister was not to be lightly judged."

CHAPTER VII.

RALPH ATHERSTONE.

ORMEROD had comfortable but not luxurious chambers in Piccadilly. If there is anything in the theory that a man's rooms always reflect his character and tastes, then Ormerod's tastes were severely simple, and his character was at least free from a love of display. The three rooms he occupied when in town were furnished plainly, with a view rather to solid comfort than to artistic ornamentation. There were no monstrosities in the way of old china, no Queen Anne tables, no bric-à-brac, no marvels of modern-antique furniture.

The easy-chairs were comfortable, but simply covered with leather of a sober hue; a business-like writing-table was the most prominent object in the room Ormerod used

as a study—a room which an ordinary young man of ample means would have converted into a sort of masculine boudoir, enriched with the spoil of Wardour Street and decked with any amount of artistic frippery. But Ormerod cared for none of these things. The writing-table was strewn with blue-books, the walls were lined from floor to ceiling with ponderous volumes—abstruse works on all sorts of subjects: Law, Political Economy, Finance, Political History. This ambitious young man "scorned delights and lived laborious days" in grim earnest. His reading, though eminently practical, had been extensive; he knew something of a great many things; he had accumulated a vast amount of information, and he had studied deeply those subjects necessary for one who aspired to be a statesman.

His intellect, if not of the loftiest order, was undeniably fine. If he had little of the fire of true genius, he was free from that nervous excitability and unrestfulness which so often accompany that divine essence. His talents were solid rather than brilliant; they commanded respect, even admiration, but did not rouse enthusiasm.

Ormerod's failure to carry his hearers with him when he addressed a large audience—and that he did so fail no one knew better than himself—was perhaps owing to his own lack of that magical and irresistible *élan*—that passion of conviction which carries away the listener often against his will and his cooler reason. Still he was a man for whom any acute observer might safely predict success. He was not of the stuff of which failures are made. His quiet, dogged determination to achieve success was alone almost sufficient to win it. Years ago he had laid to heart the hackneyed but wise maxim that "everything comes to the man who can wait." He would wait, his patience was boundless; and his ambitious dreams would be realized. Meanwhile, he was content to work—and work hard, because he never doubted that all he wished for would one day be his.

On the morning following his visit to Rollestone House, Ormerod applied himself as usual to his books, but was vexed to find that, for some inexplicable reason, his mind

obstinately turned away from the abstruse work on Political Economy on which he was trying to concentrate his thoughts. The well-balanced sentences conveyed no meaning to him; he thrust both hands through his hair, bent over the heavy volume with knitted brows and resolutely re-read the passage. No, it was useless. Fragments of yesterday's conversation under the shade of the cedar-tree and in Lady Villebois' drawing-room obtruded themselves on his memory, and usurped the place of the elaborate calculations he was trying to master. He frowned and bit his lips; he was a hard task-master to himself, and never yet had he allowed any vagrant fancies to come between him and his work.

"What a blockhead I am this morning!" he muttered, impatiently. "Positively I have read this passage over three times, and have not the vaguest idea what it is about."

He read the knotty passage once more, but his thoughts wandered off again, and before his mind's eye arose a vision of a woman's face—a face soul-lit, impassioned, and beautiful as a poet's ideal—a face with deep-gray eyes which met his with a clear, frank gaze—the face of Vivien Lowry.

"That girl has, I am sure, an uncommon character," mused Ormerod. "I no longer wonder at the contradictory rumors I have heard about her. Some people call her merely 'odd,' but she has certainly none of the external eccentricities of dress or manner which usually distinguish oddities. Her ideas of life may be 'odd,' for they are certainly peculiar, especially in a young and beautiful woman—but I should never class her merely as an 'oddity.' To begin with, I dislike the epithet. Again, I have heard her called 'a genius.' Perhaps she is. She is certainly original; and originality is an attribute of genius. I shall be more able to judge her when I know her better. She interests me keenly; so I shall make a point of calling at Rollestone House as soon as I can conveniently do so. At any rate, the world is right in one of its verdicts; every one seems to agree that she is beautiful. She is, and in a greater degree than any

woman I have yet seen. What a picture she made standing against the dark bole of the cedar-tree in her white gown! Millais should have painted her just as she stood there—with that ray of sunlight on her hair and brow! Sybil—dear child—for she is, after all, but a child, and a very sweet and loving one, too— Yes; I should like her to know Miss Lowry. It is strange that she was so persistent in trying to learn something about Lady Villebois' *protégée*. Well, as that lady seems inclined to go down to Grasshire this autumn, it is by no means improbable that they may meet—"

How long Ormerod's soliloquy (it was not uttered aloud, after the manner of stage heroes) would have lasted, it is impossible to say; but, at that moment, he was roused from his musings by a sharp knock at the door.

"Come in," he called out, without looking round.

He expected no visitors, and the intruder was probably only his servant, with a note or telegram from one of his political friends. The door opened, and some one entered the room. But the quick, firm step was not the cautious tread of a menial, and the deep, hearty tones which uttered the brief greeting, "Well, Ormerod, old fellow, I have run you to earth at last!" were certainly not those of his well-trained valet.

"Ralph Atherstone! by all that's wonderful," cried Ormerod, springing up, and confronting his visitor. "Where in the world have you come from?"

"Is that your welcome, O friend of my youth?" laughed the other. "Well, well, I forgive you. You and I were never of the demonstrative sort."

The two men shook hands with a cordiality that rather gave the lie to the assertion.

"Glad to see you, for all that," said Ormerod, heartily. "Sit down, and light up. I know you can't talk sensibly, or even connectedly, without the aid of tobacco. You will find some tolerable cigars in that box."

"I take you at your word," said Atherstone, helping himself from the receptacle indicated, "though I scorn the insinuation that my brain requires a stimulant before it can work to any purpose."

Ormerod laughed and leisurely selected a cigar, lit it, and then, leaning back in his chair, abandoned himself to the enjoyment of the weed, which some term pernicious and others soothing.

"Your first question," began Atherstone, with mock gravity—"I call it your first advisedly, for I foresee that it will be followed by many others—was, 'Where have I come from?' I answer: in the immediate present, from a hansom which conveyed me from my hotel to your inhospitable diggings; in the near past, from on board the ocean-steamer *Calyx*, which conveyed me from New York; in the remote past, from Omaha, Idaho, San Francisco, Japan, China, and a few other countries. I have, in short, occupied the five years which have elapsed since we parted in what the Americans call 'globe-trotting.' In more finished phrase, I have traversed the greater part of the habitable earth, made the acquaintance of all sorts and conditions of men; and, I hope, have acquired a tolerable stock of useful information."

"You were always an unsettled mortal," remarked Ormerod, dryly. "I hope you have had your fill of wandering at last, and mean to settle down as a peaceful citizen and a useful member of society."

"I don't think you, or any man, can accuse me of pugnacity; my usefulness is still questionable."

"I mean, rather," said Ormerod, in a graver tone, "do you intend to resume the practice of the profession you thought fit to throw up five years ago?"

"Do I mean to go in for feeling pulses and looking at tongues?—in brief, do I mean to practice as a doctor? No; there is too much chicanery, too much charlatanism in the medical profession to suit me. I speak, of course, of the ordinary medicos of every-day life; for the great ones of medical science I have nothing but respect and admiration. Of course, I do not think all the humbler members of the profession are contemptible—God forbid; but my experience of the fraternity was an unfortunate one, and has given me a distaste for the whole tribe. No; whatever my faults are, I am not a humbug, so I don't mean to go in for doctoring."

"And you were once such an enthusiast!"

Atherstone laughed a short and somewhat cynical laugh, but made no retort.

"Then may I ask what is your object in returning to England?" asked Ormerod.

"I am, for the moment, sick of travel, and I am writing a book—or, rather, I mean to write one, for the materials are but simmering in my brain."

"Write a book by all means, and I will cut it up in a review. A knowledge of one's faults is the most bracing of mental tonics."

"Cut my book up, will you?—and you don't even know the subject. You're a nice sort of conscientious critic."

"The subject is quite a secondary consideration. I shall read your book with the settled determination of finding fault with it—that is the secret of severe criticism—and I shall succeed in finding out all the weak places in your literary armor. So look out."

"So I will when the book is written; meanwhile, I shall take the liberty of keeping the subject to myself, and thus excite your curiosity, which I can see is already aroused at the very fact that I intend to perpetrate authorship. Not that there is anything wonderful in that; as the *cacoethes scribendi* is the most widespread of social ailments, it is not to be expected that I should escape it."

Ormerod looked keenly at the speaker; he knew, none better, in spite of his tone of half-cynical banter, that Atherstone's intellect was much above the average. In their college days the two men had been close friends, though Atherstone was Ormerod's senior by two or three years. In their respective ways they were equally gifted, although the younger man's talents were more calculated to command success in life.

Ormerod had a strong liking for facts, while Atherstone was eminently speculative and something of a dreamer—he loved to ponder the remoter possibilities of science, and abstract theories of life. Atherstone's reading had extended to all sorts of out-of-the-way lore,

while Ormerod had gone steadily on in the particular path he had chosen, swerving neither to the right nor to the left to wander among the by-ways his friend loved.

In externals the two men were as dissimilar as in mental conformation. Atherstone lacked the charm of manner which distinguished Ormerod. Though his features were more correct, they were cast in a rougher mold, and there was about him an air of sturdy independence which made those who observed him closely feel that he was a man who held strong opinions—and held them with tenacity. His fine eyes met yours with a bold and hardy glance, as if to say, "I fear neither you nor any man alive." They were besides undeniably fine eyes—their expression varied with every passing emotion; they were alternately dreamy and vivacious, earnest and penetrating, sometimes, though rarely, tender. His lips were firm, his jaw powerful; on the whole, it was a face that roused interest rather than admiration. In stature he was slightly above middle height, well-knit and muscular in figure, and he bore himself rather with the ease which accompanies great strength than with the ease that is the result of grace of form.

"I see that your travels have not cured you of your crotchets," said Ormerod, smiling, as he met his friend's eyes—they were lit with half-cynical humor at that moment. "I never knew such a fellow for flinging away his best chances in life. With your talents you might have risen to the very highest position in any profession. You might have succeeded in any vocation—politics, law, medicine, to say nothing of the Church or of either of the fighting professions."

"But, my good fellow—pray spare me the flow of your oratorical eloquence—that is exactly 'the head and front of my offending,' I might have done much had I known clearly what my vocation was. I did not know it years ago, and I don't know it now. If I did, I should ask nothing better from Fate than to follow it with all my heart and soul. You know what Carlyle says: 'The man is blessed who has found his work; let him ask no other blessedness. He has a work, a life-purpose; he has

found it and will follow it.' I have *not* found my life-purpose, and I don't suppose I shall now."

"What nonsense!—why, you can't be more than two or three and thirty: life is only just beginning for you."

"Perhaps; but I doubt it. I think if a man has not discovered the purpose for which he was born into the world before he is thirty, he is in great danger of never doing so."

"Nonsense! Look at some of our best and greatest men; have they not developed late in life?"

"Granted; but I am not of that order," retorted Atherstone, coolly. "But enough of this egotistical talk. I have had too much of my own society of late. I came here this morning to seek yours, not to discuss the very remote chances of my success in life. Let me hear how you have spent the years since I left England. Rumors have reached me even across the Atlantic that you are considered what is called 'a promising young man'—are you?"

Ormerod laughed.

"That question is a facer. I really must decline to answer it," he said, lightly; "but I can tell you how I have spent the last five years—in hard work."

"To qualify yourself for still harder, I suppose, when you become one of the shining lights of St. Stephen's. But haven't you done anything else but work?—haven't you even fallen in love, or are you above such follies? By heaven! you change color! I have found you out! Out with your confession—make a clean breast of it without delay."

"Fallen in love!" said Ormerod, with a slightly embarrassed laugh—"well, I don't know about that—you know I was never sentimental—but I am certainly engaged to be married."

"Wish you joy, my dear fellow, with all my heart," said Atherstone, suddenly dropping his bantering manner and holding out his hand. "Who is the lady?"

"Sybil Le Marchant."

As the name passed Ormerod's lips, his hand clasped Atherstone's, and for a moment both were silent. A

shadow fell on the latter's face; one of those strange flashes of what,for want of a better word, is called "foreknowledge" had passed through his brain. He could not understand the feeling; though he was imaginative in a high degree, he was not morbid. Ormerod seemed to catch a reflex of his friend's thought, and he, too, was vaguely troubled.

"Do you know her?" he said, in some surprise. "But no, she was only a child when you left England."

"I never saw the young lady that I know of," said Atherstone, trying to speak in his usual careless manner; "perhaps I knew her in a previous existence," he added, smiling.

"You may have heard the name of Le Marchant before," remarked Ormerod, carelessly.

"It is possible," said the other, indifferently—"indeed, now you mention it, the name has certainly a familiar sound. Le Marchant—let me think; perhaps I attended some one of that name during my brief career as a doctor. As it is a period which holds few pleasant recollections, I have striven to forget it. I daresay my association with the name of Le Marchant will return some time or other. Of course the young lady herself is everything that is charming; I remember your fastidious taste."

"She is very pretty," said Ormerod, slowly, "and very simple and child-like; you know I always hated strong-minded women."

He spoke sharply, as if he were angry with himself—as if he meant to convince himself of the truth of his words. Yes; he did hate strong-minded women—he had always hated them, and he did so still. True, he had been betrayed into a temporary apostasy from his creed; he had been surprised into admiring a woman whose mind was certainly not weak. But could Miss Lowry be called precisely "strong-minded"? The term was so associated with qualities she certainly did not possess that Ormerod was averse to apply it to her. No; he resolved to think of her simply as the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. Her mental qualities were nothing to

him. Why should he not admire her as he would a beautiful picture or statue? There was no harm in that, certainly no disloyalty to Sybil.

Atherstone, who was a keen observer, saw the troubled look on his friend's face, and wondered what was passing in his mind.

"Very pretty, very simple, and child-like," he repeated, smiling slightly. "A charming description. Of course you are devoted to each other?"

"Of course," echoed Ormerod, absently.

"Is Miss Le Marchant in London now? Am I likely to meet her during my stay here?'

"Not unless you mean to spend some months in town. Mr. and Mrs. Le Marchant do not intend to come up this season."

"Where do the Le Marchants live?" persisted Atherstone, who seemed prompted by some indefinable feeling of curiosity regarding the family of his friend's betrothed, though that eminently vulgar vice seldom swayed him.

"At Dallas Towers, near Compton Magna, in Grasshire," replied Ormerod, carelessly.

"At Dallas Towers!" repeated Atherstone, starting. "Why, what an odd thing! The name of Dallas seems even more familiar to me than that of Le Marchant."

"It is not such an uncommon name."

"Neither is it a very common one. Dallas! Yes, certainly I have some past association with the name, which I cannot for the moment recall. Five years spent in strange lands dulls some memories, and completely blots out others. I daresay this particular one is only dulled, not obliterated. Be that as it may," he added, lightly; "I won't bore you by recounting *à haut voix* my mental processes, so I will wish you good-morning. My brain being preoccupied in trying to rouse dormant recollection, I know I shall be stupid company."

He rose as he spoke, shook hands with Ormerod, and left the room as abruptly as he had entered it.

"What an odd fellow he is," soliloquized Felix, smiling. "Just the same clever, foolish, unpractical, contradictory being he used to be at college! What a piece of

quixotism it was, that fancy of his for being a doctor. Imagine a man of his talents going through the drudgery of hospital work, as he did, because he had a fancy for 'doing good in his generation!' And now he is bitter against the profession he once exalted to the skies, because he happened to be associated for a time with a rascally doctor. The whole thing was folly. How could he hope to succeed? He is too thin-skinned. Atherstone is not of the stuff of which fashionable physicians are made. In spite of all his oddities, though, I always liked the fellow. By-the-by, I wonder how he and Miss Lowry would get on together—they would certainly agree on many points . . . . "

And so his thoughts wandered off again to Vivien, until he checked them sternly, and tried to cheat himself into the belief that he was really reading to some purpose. But, after half-an-hour's struggle, he threw his task aside, and, as it was clearly impossible to fix his mind on political economy, he decided that for once he would be frivolous. So he spent another half-hour in making a careful toilet, and then sauntered out to enjoy the rest of the morning under the trees in the Row.

CHAPTER VIII.

A RETROSPECT.

WHEN Atherstone left Ormerod's rooms, he paced along Piccadilly rapidly, but quite at random. He had nothing particular to do that morning, and, as after five years' absence the once familiar streets of the metropolis had something of the charm of novelty for him, he found sufficient amusement in watching the ever-varying kaleidoscope of London life.

Piccadilly was as crowded as it usually is on a bright morning in June, and the movement and bustle around him had an exhilarating effect on Atherstone's mind.

"After all, London is the center of the universe—at

least, to an Englishman," he thought, as he sauntered along, "and the pulse of life beats strongest here."

He felt glad to be back again in the well-known thoroughfares; they were full of associations for him—some pleasant, some painful. Though he had spoken scoffingly to Ormerod of that period of his life when enthusiasm and love for his fellows had prompted him to turn aside from the more brilliant paths which had once opened before him to adopt a profession that, whatever its detractors may say, is one of the noblest a man can follow.

With his high and perhaps somewhat quixotic ideas, it was unfortunate that, at the very earliest stage of his career, he had been associated with one whose aims in life were low and selfish. He had imagined an ideal view of a doctor's mission; his first practical experience showed him the reverse of the picture. Atherstone was a conscientious man, and he loved truth above all things. Imagine, therefore, the painful ordeal it was to him to be in constant association with one who cared for little else but money-getting; who added pound to pound with greedy eagerness, and looked on his patients simply as so many paying speculations; who could flatter an hypochondriac peer, pander to the tastes of a gossip-loving dowager, and humor the whims of any number of aristocratic *malades imaginaires*, because it paid him to do so. Fat old Lady Oldacres' fanciful ailments were worth a couple of hundred a year to him, then why, argued this astute Esculapius, should he tell her with brutal, if truthful, frankness that there was really nothing the matter with her that air, exercise and that wonderful panacea "something to do" would not cure?

Augustus Fletcher had made up his mind early in life that the *rôle* of a fashionable physician would suit him exactly, and, though at the time Atherstone bought half his practice he had not yet attained to that enviable position, he was getting on rapidly, and was considered a rising man in his profession.

Atherstone was soon disgusted with his colleague's ignorance, conceit and worldliness; and was tempted to forfeit the money he had paid for the privilege of doing

the unremunerated work shirked by Fletcher, and throw up the whole thing. But a sort of stubborn pride forbade him to take this drastic measure. The friends who had vainly tried to dissuade him from adopting a profession they thought unsuited to his position should not have the satisfaction of taunting him with that peculiarly aggravating reproach, "I told you so." For two years he labored on, chafing at the enforced companionship with such a man as Augustus Fletcher; for two years he bowed his neck to the yoke, working early and late, renouncing all society, devoting his days to patient plodding at the drudgery of his profession and his nights to study. Then one day in a fit of disgust he broke his bonds, and, shaking the dust of London off his feet, went to America.

To-day, as he strolled idly through the crowded streets, Atherstone recalled that disagreeable chapter in his life —a chapter that he had done his best to forget during the past five years. It is not a pleasant thing for a man to dwell on the mistakes he has made, and, as far as he could, Atherstone had endeavored to blot out the remembrance of his brief career as a doctor; but the conversation with Ormerod had forced his thoughts back into old channels. As he walked on with bent head and abstracted mien, many bitter memories surged through his brain. He recalled the numerous humiliations he had been forced to endure, the bitter disappointment, the disgust he felt as he saw behind the scenes of Augustus Fletcher's life.

"What a knave and what a fool the fellow was!" he thought, as he recalled some of the fashionable physician's worldly maxims. "I daresay he thought *me* a fool for not being a knave. How well I remember some of his patients, or rather his dupes, that would be the better word—Lady Methuselah, with her poodle, her neuralgia, her evangelical parson, and her 'dear, kind Dr. Fletcher!' Well, well, I suppose the fellow knew on which side his bread was buttered. By-the-by, what a world of cynical humor there is in some of those old sayings!"

Atherstone was so wrapped in thought that he was perfectly unconscious of his whereabouts. He had turned up Bond Street, and again diverged into a quieter thoroughfare. Memory is a strange thing, and trifles will sometimes recall important events. Atherstone came to a corner where two streets met; he paused absently and looked up at the name of the street: "Brook Street." Suddenly there flashed across his mind the name of Le Marchant—Le Marchant, Brook Street; the two names in association recalled as if by magic an incident in his past life, the remembrance of which five years of travel and adventure had well-nigh obliterated. Le Marchant—Brook Street. Yes, he remembered it all now clearly. He walked musingly on until he reached the house from whence unhappy Tristram Lowry had turned away in bitterness and anger one cold January night.

Atherstone paused and looked up at the windows. The balconies were bright with gay summer flowers, and the tones of a piano were wafted toward him. There was a look of prosperity about the house; the paint was clean and fresh, the steps well whitened, the brass knocker flashed like gold in the sunshine.

"I wonder who lives here now," he mused. "I suppose my old patient Mr. Dallas has paid Nature's debt long ago. Well, of course it was no concern of mine, but I always thought it a queer affair about that will. I remember I felt an interest in the old man; he seemed so desolate and weighed down by care; and he was so afraid of that black-browed nephew of his, Le Marchant. Le Marchant—by-the-by, that is the name of Ormerod's *fiancée*. Wonder if she is any relation of the Le Marchant I saw five years ago in this house? She may be; it isn't a common name. Ah! of course she must be, though; Ormerod said her people lived at a place called Dallas Towers. Odd that I should have been mixed up in the affairs of Ormerod's future wife's relations. At the time, I know I didn't like the look of Le Marchant at all. Clever rascal, I should say, judging from his phiz; but I never like men whose eyebrows run up obliquely—they're not to be trusted. I'll ask Ormerod, when I see him again, when Dallas died,

and whether this Le Marchant succeeded to the property. I daresay that rascal Fletcher knows all about it, but I don't choose to renew my acquaintance with *him*."

Here Atherstone, seeing that his scrutiny of the house was exciting the curiosity of the passers-by, and of a smart housemaid looking out of one of the upper windows, resumed his walk, still meditating on the strange chapter of accidents which had brought to his remembrance that half-forgotten circumstance of his visit to the house in Brook Street. Other thoughts and other interests, however, soon came to occupy his mind, and he let the matter slip from his memory in happy unconsciousness that future events would again recall it at a very important crisis of his life.

CHAPTER IX.

AN AFTERNOON CALL.

ORMEROD kept his resolution: he seized the first available opportunity of again calling on Lady Villebois. The inexplicable manner in which Miss Lowry's face had come between him and his studies, on the morning of Atherstone's unexpected appearance, puzzled him considerably. He could not understand why she had made such an impression upon him. It could not be merely her beauty. He had seen women almost, if not quite, as beautiful, and they had never awakened any feeling in him stronger than admiration. But this girl was unlike any other woman he had ever met. He was sure that under that quiet exterior lay immense possibilities of nobleness, of self-sacrifice, of womanly courage—but was she not cold?

"I wonder what effect love would have on such a character as hers," he thought; "if a woman like Vivien Lowry ever could love. Perhaps she is incapable of such a sentiment. I cannot tell; I have never seen any one like her before."

He never for a moment thought that the most thrilling experience in a woman's life had not yet come to Vivien. The kindling flame of love had not yet fallen from heaven. She was not yet thoroughly human; she was fair as Pygmalion's statue before the breath of life was breathed into it, but was she not as cold? True, her face had kindled with feeling as she spoke of the sorrow and suffering of the poor—she had not seemed cold then—but did she not lack the warm, loving tenderness of a girl like Sybil? Perhaps she did; he would watch her. It would be an interesting study of character to do so. He knew so little of feminine human nature.

He had been accustomed to look on women as ciphers in the political world—and that was *his* world—and he disliked the fashionable lady politicians he met in society. But Miss Lowry, he felt sure, was no mere cipher—and he certainly did not dislike her. Why should he? she was as unlike the typical female politician as she was to the typical "strong-minded" woman his soul abhorred. It was vexing to find that Miss Lowry could not be classed with any of the varieties of the sex he had hitherto seen—Ormerod was fond of classification. She was not a fashionable young lady; not a coquette; not a woman with a mission; not a blue-stocking—what was she?

During his ride to Chiswick, Ormerod pondered the subject. But when he drew rein at Rollestone House he was as far from arriving at any conclusion on the subject as when he mounted his horse in Piccadilly. He decided that it would be more easy to form an opinion when he had seen the young lady again.

Lady Villebois was at home, and Ormerod was ushered into the long, low, old-fashioned drawing-room—an apartment that had a certain celebrity of its own, because during the past forty years Lady Villebois had entertained in it some of the most brilliant lights of the political, literary, and artistic worlds. It was a charming room, with long, French windows opening out on the terrace. The tastes of its owner were indicated in many small ways. A grand piano stood in a prominent posi-

tion, not hustled away ignominiously in a corner, but occupying a place worthy of its glorious tones. Books of all sorts—not merely the conventional morocco and gilt editions of the poets, which are generally considered most suitable for drawing-room perusal—were scattered about in orderly disorder. The pictures on the walls were gems of their various schools; portfolios, full of rare prints, stood on low easels. It was a room that told of daily occupancy, and consequently there was not a trace of the prim neatness—that foe to real comfort—which disfigures the majority of drawing-rooms.

Ormerod walked to one of the open windows, and looked out across to the cedar-tree, under whose shade he half expected to see the two ladies sitting. But he was disappointed. The garden was deserted. He turned quickly at the sound of an opening door and of a little gush of song. The room was long, and Ormerod was half hidden by the curtains which draped the window. He guessed the singer must be Vivien, and came forward at once, though the temptation to watch her unseen for a moment was strong. Her song broke off abruptly as she caught sight of him, and she looked a little embarrassed as she held out her hand. She had not heard of Ormerod's arrival; and a sudden feeling of shyness brought a rush of color to her face.

"How do you do, Miss Lowry?" said Ormerod, smiling. Her evident embarrassment gave him a consciousness of calm self-possession that was very pleasant.

This odd girl had on several occasions made him feel vaguely dissatisfied with himself. It was agreeable to him to think that he had her at a disadvantage. But Vivien's habitual serenity of manner soon returned to her.

"I had no idea you were in the room, Mr. Ormerod," she said, frankly; "or I should certainly not have treated you to a musical impromptu."

"Do not apologize for letting me hear a few notes of a fine voice."

Vivien looked at him in undisguised wonder. For a moment, an idea had flashed through her mind that he spoke in satire; but she put the thought aside as she met

his direct gaze. Vivien was keenly sensitive to ridicule, especially on any point on which she fancied herself deficient. She loved music, and the fact that she lacked even the rudiments of a musical education was a continual source of regret to her. Her voice was a gift of Nature. It was powerful, sweet, and thrilling, but entirely uncultivated; and she was particularly averse to its display.

"I know nothing of music," she said, with a slight flush of vexation on her cheeks; "and I do not sing."

"I never venture to contradict a lady," remarked Felix; "but at the same time I must enter a protest against the last statement."

Vivien bit her lip; she began to think that, after all, her first impression had been a true one. Mr. Ormerod *was* sarcastic. The color deepened in her cheeks; she could not help that, but she was resolved not to show by her manner that she was vexed or hurt, and she quietly began to talk of something else.

Ormerod was somewhat amused at the serious way in which she had taken a compliment which any one versed in the usages of society would have accepted and lightly passed off. He did not know that the consciousness of her deficiency in those accomplishments which form part of every well-brought-up young lady's education made her extremely sensitive to anything like ridicule. Indeed, he had accustomed himself to think of her as so richly dowered with mental gifts that the absence of such mere surface culture never struck him as a thing to be regretted or even missed in Vivien. As he knew little or nothing of her early history, he could not guess that every casual reference to what many people would have called her lack of education roused sad memories of why that lack existed. He did not know this, but he was observant enough to see that she was pained, and, though he was perfectly innocent of any intention of satirizing her, he felt that he had been guilty of a *gaucherie* in attempting to compliment her. She puzzled him more than ever. He wondered why she seemed so sensitive. Other women took compliments readily, some even greedily.

"I suppose this is one of the things that make people call Miss Lowry odd," he thought.

At that moment their brief *tête-à-tête* was summarily ended by Lady Villebois, who entered the room and greeted Ormerod with her usual bright grace. That quick-witted lady saw the look of pain in Vivien's eyes, and the slightly puzzled expression on Ormerod's face. She feared that her two favorites were not getting on well together, and she wondered on what subject they had already contrived to disagree. It was vexing, because she particularly wished them to like each other. Nay, more; though she was the last person in the world to turn match-maker, it had crossed her mind that the two were particularly well-suited to each other in character, and that possibly they might some day find it out. Of course she knew nothing of Ormerod's engagement to Sybil Le Marchant, or the shadowy little air-castle she had been amusing herself in building would never have been reared.

Women of vivid imagination and active brain are often guilty of weaving these innocent romances for the people about them, even when they have arrived at an age when such follies are supposed to have been long since put aside as one of the pleasant "childish things" belonging to the bright period of youth.

Lady Villebois, in spite of her threescore years and ten, had still a keen love of romance, when it did not degenerate into sickly sentimentality. Perhaps this love of romance was one of the things that kept her heart so fresh and youthful, that made her sympathies so warm and so wide. It was certainly one of the causes of her wide popularity with young people.

"We have quite made up our minds to go to Mordaunt's Rest this year," said Lady Villebois, suddenly, when Ormerod had made the usual inquiries after her health, and paid the usual conversational tribute to a topic universally discussed in England, *i.e.*, the weather. "As the attractions of the London season pall on me after some fifty years' experience, and as Miss Lowry differs from most girls in preferring the fresh air and quiet of the country

to the stifling heat and vapid chatter of London drawing-rooms, it is possible that we may migrate from town a month earlier than we intended. I mean to write and give orders for a general setting-to-right of the house and grounds."

Ormerod's face brightened.

"I am so glad," he said, cordially. "I hope to spend some weeks in Grasshire this autumn—and," he added, hesitating slightly, "I have some friends there whose acquaintance I hope you and Miss Lowry will make."

He wished to tell Lady Villebois of his engagement to Sybil, but a species of *mauvaise honte* forbade him. Though Ormerod could not be called a shy man, he was by nature reserved, and he had a horror of boring people with his private affairs. So, though the words which in all probability would have changed the course of several lives hovered on his lips, he checked himself, and the opportunity of speaking them passed away.

"We shall be charmed to do so," said Lady Villebois, graciously. "I daresay there are many changes in Grasshire society since I was last at Mordaunt's Rest. All the people I knew fifty years ago will no doubt be dead and forgotten, and I shall be made to feel that I am one of the veterans who lag superfluous on life's stage."

She spoke lightly, but there was an undercurrent of sadness in her tone. It seemed as if the mere mention of the scene of her early sorrows was sufficient to wake sad memories.

"No doubt you will find changes among the Grasshire people," said Ormerod. "In these days of rapidly-acquired fortunes one is often amazed to find the man received to-day in what used to be the most exclusive society who yesterday was considered quite outside the pale."

"It is all a question of money nowadays," remarked Lady Villebois, with a shrug and a sigh; "we are fast degenerating from an aristocracy to a plutocracy, and I, 'as one solitary individual,' don't think the change will be an improvement. For my part, I think there is nothing more contemptible than the worship of money for money's sake, which seems to be the characteristic of

this age. A man may be deficient in every quality that deserves admiration; he may be narrow-minded, vulgar, arrogant, but if only his income can be reckoned by six figures he is in a manner deified. My ideas on political economy would astonish you, Mr. Ormerod," she added, smiling. "Do you know that I think the gigantic incomes of some half-dozen of those plutocrats are a positive scandal. They ought to be cut down by act of Parliament, and out of their superfluous wealth should be created a State Fund for use in any national emergency, so that that haunting terror to Chancellors of the Exchequer—the necessity for adding an extra penny to the Income Tax—may be obviated. Think of the rejoicing there would be among the toiling, moiling middle-classes, who live in a perpetual struggle to keep up a respectable appearance, and yet keep out of debt!"

"But," said Ormerod, quietly, "suppose, by an arbitrary exercise of power, you *did* cut down these gigantic fortunes, would you not take away one of the incentives to work which now encourages many a man to struggle out of poverty to wealth?"

"And a very good thing, too!" replied her ladyship, boldly. "A man should be content with moderate wealth. If he has enough to live in comfort, even in luxury—enough to educate his children, and fit them for their fight with the world—is not that enough? Is it not a fact that great wealth hardens people's hearts; that excessive luxury dulls the intellect, just as it enervates the body? I think the most unfortunate thing that can befall a young man is to inherit a fortune which makes work of any sort unnecessary. Don't you think that a man who knows that unless he works—and works hard—he will not be able to enjoy the rest from labor which is the rightful prerogative of old age? Don't you think that a man who has spent his youth in work will be far nobler than a man who has only lived to enjoy himself from the hour of his birth to the hour of his death?"

"Granted. But are you not begging the question a little, Lady Villebois?" said Felix, smiling. "What I argued was, would not one of the most powerful incent-

ives to work be removed, if any limit were placed to the acquisition of wealth?"

"I think not. After all, wealth is only comparative. If, say, fifty thousand a year was the maximum, and no one possessed more, would not that sum carry as much social importance with it as an income of two hundred and fifty thousand does now? And then," she went on, with enthusiasm, "think, in time of any severe depression of trade or agriculture, how easy it would be to relieve distress out of that 'National Fund' of my dreams!"

"I thought you intended that for purposes of national defense," said Ormerod. "Ladies are, strange to say, always on the side of war."

"Defense is not war," retorted Lady Villebois, quickly; "and I don't mean to allow you to sneer at my sex. Women are not such fools as men try to believe them. I am quite tired of hearing about women's inconsistency, weakness, and vanity. Are not men occasionally inconsistent, weak, and vain?"

"Granted again. I am the last person to depreciate women. Pray don't think I meant to do so in saying that women are always on the side of war."

"There is one war in which I should like to see every woman engaged," said Vivien, in a low voice. "The war of good against evil."

"Hear, hear, Vivien," said Lady Villebois, clapping her hands. "There, Mr. Ormerod, is a reproof for you. Miss Lowry has been listening to our foolish talk, and, I have no doubt, has criticised us pretty severely."

"Indeed, no!" said Vivien, eagerly. "I quite agree with you, Lady Villebois, in thinking that great wealth is an evil. I think, if you had seen as much of poverty as I have, Mr. Ormerod, you would think as we do."

She looked so beautiful, with that eager light in her eyes, that Ormerod felt it would not need a very powerful argument to induce him to alter any opinion he held.

Though, until then, Vivien had not joined in the conversation, the changing expression of her face told that she was listening attentively; and Ormerod thought her

silence was a great deal more eloquent than most people's speech.

"If I seem to argue on the side of wealth, Miss Lowry," he said, gravely, "it is not because I am a rich man, or because my sympathies lie with the rich. I grieve as sincerely as any one over the cruel poverty that is the lot of so many; but how that poverty is to be alleviated without degrading the people to pauperism I cannot see. It is a question that has puzzled wiser heads than mine."

"And than mine and yours, Vivien," added Lady Villebois, laughing. "There, dear child, is a nice little implied reproof for us, so we won't venture to say any more, lest Mr. Ormerod should think—though, of course, he would be too polite to give the thought utterance—that 'fools rush in where angels fear to tread.' No more political economy—it is strong meat for babes. Change the subject. Let us return to the frivolous topics proper to our sex. Now, Mr. Ormerod, pray amuse us, since we may not be instructed; tell us the very last delicious piece of scandal—love of scandal is supposed to be a purely feminine taste, like tea, though I have heard it whispered that a good deal of both commodities is circulated in clubs; but I daresay that, too, is only scandal."

"I am afraid not," said Felix, laughing. "I think love of gossip, to say nothing of scandal, was introduced into club-land with the tea-pot; there is, I am inclined to think, an elective affinity between the two."

"By that token, Vivien, it is tea-time," said her ladyship, as Wilson entered with the tea-equipage. "Now, Mr. Ormerod, let us leave no doubt about 'the elective affinity' of which you speak. Now for tea and scandal!"

CHAPTER X.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

A WEEK after Ormerod called at Rollestone House, he went down to Grasshire for a couple of days. Sybil was unaffectedly glad to see him; she welcomed him with her brightest smile and most charming blush. The period of her lover's absence had not been one of unmixed happiness to her. Mrs. Le Marchant's nerves had been particularly weak of late, demanding the utmost tact and patience on the part of those about her.

Le Marchant, who looked gloomier and more forbidding than ever, received his future son-in-law with the same formal courtesy he had shown him on his first visit to the Towers; and Ormerod felt that, to all intents and purposes, he was as little acquainted with the true character of his host as he was then. Le Marchant puzzled him more than ever; he looked a trifle worn and harassed, as if life's cares weighed heavily upon him, and Ormerod noticed with wonder that he often seemed nervous and uneasy; there was, too, a suppressed excitement in his manner at times which was strangely at variance with his usual impassiveness.

"I wonder if he has been going in for money speculations," thought Felix, as he watched Le Marchant curiously on the evening of his arrival at the Towers; "he looks gnawed with anxiety, and financial worries are generally at the root of the secret cares of men of his caliber. That unsettled look of the eye tells me that my respected father-in-law-to-be has something on his mind, and I am inclined to think that that 'something' is insecure securities."

With this idea in his head, Ormerod tried to turn the conversation to financial topics, in the hope that Le Marchant would confide his anxieties, whatever they were, to him. But Le Marchant seemed indisposed for any confidences, and met the other's advances with a cold indifference that was as insuperable as a barrier of ice, and soon

proposed that they should join the ladies in the drawing-room.

It was a hot, sultry night, and, though the long French windows stood open, not a breath of air moved the curtains, not a leaf stirred outside.

Mrs. Le Marchant was reclining in a graceful attitude on a sofa with a large feather fan in her hand. A pink-shaded lamp stood on a table near her, and cast a becoming flush on her faded face. Ormerod did not feel in the humor for a *tête-à-tête* with his hostess, and he glanced round the room in search of his betrothed.

"Sybil is on the terrace," murmured Mrs. Le Marchant, querulously. "I warned her that she risked taking cold by exposing herself to the night air, but she wouldn't listen to me."

Ormerod made no reply. The implied reproach at the absent Sybil's lack of obedience made him smile, and yet it vexed him. He could not understand why Mrs. Le Marchant took such pleasure in finding fault with her daughter. The want of maternal affection she displayed made him feel a chivalrous sort of pity for Sybil which gave an added warmth to his manner when he joined her on the terrace.

He drew her hand through his arm as they paced slowly up and down. The light from the open windows showed him the look of quiet happiness in her eyes, and it seemed to him that she looked prettier than ever with that look of sweet seriousness on her face—a seriousness which comes to the youngest girl when she loves, or fancies she loves, truly.

A half-remorseful consciousness was upon him that during the past fortnight—in short, since he had first seen Vivien Lowry—he had not thought as much about Sybil as he ought to have done, that he had somehow been guilty of disloyalty in comparing her to her disadvantage with another woman. As Sybil's soft brown eyes were lifted to his with the tender adoration he had once—nay, that he still thought so delightful, he told himself that he was unworthy of this gentle girl's love. Was she not as pretty, as feminine, as winning as she

was a few weeks ago? Then why should he ask for anything more? He hated strong-minded women, and, whatever Sybil was, she was not strong-minded. Yes, she was charming; she was his ideal of feminine perfection, and he was the happiest of men.

His mind was so full of these thoughts that, though Sybil was prattling on to him about all the small events that had happened at Dallas Towers during his absence, he hardly listened to her, and it was not until she startled him by a sudden question that he roused himself to answer her.

"Felix," she said, softly—her voice always had a tender little intonation when she uttered his name—"did you keep your promise? did you go to call on Lady Villebois? and did you see Miss Lowry?"

"Yes," answered Ormerod, slowly, "to each of your questions. I went to call on Lady Villebois, and I saw Miss Lowry."

"And what is she like?" asked the girl, breathlessly. "Describe her to me, Felix. Oh! you don't know how often I have thought of her."

"Miss Lowry is extremely handsome—beautiful, rather."

"But that is not enough. Handsome—beautiful—two words only. I want you to tell me what she is like, the color of her eyes and hair—whether she is tall or short—everything."

"I am not a good hand at verbal portrait-painting," said Ormerod, smiling at her eagerness; "but, since you command it, I will do my best. Miss Lowry is tall, not very slight, but graceful and yet dignified. Her hair is golden, and her eyes are dark-gray, with long lashes that make them look darker still. Her features are regular, and her complexion is everything it should be."

"And is she *nice?*" asked Sybil, with dilating eyes; "do you think she would let me be her friend when we meet?—for I feel sure we shall meet some day."

"I think it is extremely probable that you will," said Felix, evasively, "because Lady Villebois and Miss Lowry are coming to Grasshire in a few weeks."

"Really!" cried Sybil, clasping both hands over his arm in her excitement. "Oh, how glad I am! But, Felix, you have not answered my question—is she nice?"

"That you must judge for yourself; I have only seen Miss Lowry twice, so you can hardly expect me to form an opinion on the matter yet."

Sybil's face fell; something in his tone chilled her.

"You speak as if you didn't like Miss Lowry, Felix," she said, sorrowfully, "don't you?"

"I did not say so."

"But *don't* you like her?" she persisted, fixing her eyes on his face.

"I—I scarcely know; as I told you, I have only seen Miss Lowry twice, and—"

"But isn't that enough? *I* always know whether I like or dislike people the first time I see them."

Ormerod smiled. Sybil's pertinacity was embarrassing, to say the least of it. How could he answer her? how could he describe his own contradictory state of mind in regard to Miss Lowry? Sybil would not understand him if he did.

"Then as you, my dear Sybil, are such a wise little woman," he said, with a somewhat unsuccessful attempt at lightness of manner, "I shall wait until you have seen Miss Lowry, and then you can tell me what *you* think about her. I believe that women are generally the best judges of women."

"And is she really coming to Grasshire—soon?"

"Certainly, unless Lady Villebois changes her mind."

"Isn't it odd how the idea of Miss Lowry has taken possession of my mind?" said Sybil, thoughtfully. "Ever since you mentioned her name and told me her story I have longed to see her."

"Take care that your idea does not turn out to be merely ideal," said Felix, smiling; "when people imagine a man or a woman to be very clever, or beautiful, or delightful, they are apt to be disappointed in the real individual."

"I feel sure I shall not be disappointed in Miss Lowry," said Sybil, with conviction; "my only fear is that she

will be so superior to poor little me that I shall never dare ask her to be my friend."

"We shall see; but I think I can promise you that she is by no means a formidable or unapproachable individual; rather the reverse," he said, musingly. "I think that she is the sort of woman you would call 'sympathetic.'"

"Then that settles it; she *is* nice!" cried Sybil, gleefully; "at last I have dragged the truth from you!"

Ormerod laughed uneasily; he felt that the subject had better not be pursued further, lest he should be drawn into making any more admissions regarding Miss Lowry, so he hastened to turn the conversation into other channels; and, as Sybil had now settled the matter (that Miss Lowry was in reality all that she loved to picture her) to her own entire satisfaction, she was ready enough to listen to Felix's account of the last new play seen by him on the previous evening.

Meanwhile, as the lovers paced slowly up and down, a pair of keen, red-brown eyes watched them curiously from the open window of the dining-room.

"I have done the best I could for the child," thought Le Marchant as he gazed. "I wanted to assure her future, at least, against all contingencies. Ormerod is a tenacious sort of fellow, I should fancy; not a man to be afflicted with quixotic scruples—a sensible fellow, in short; just the man I would choose for Sybil's husband."

And, with another keen glance at the two pacing figures, Le Marchant turned away from the window and betook himself to his study. He seldom favored, or rather troubled, his wife with his company—for Selina by no means considered her husband's society an unmixed blessing.

To-night as he threw himself listlessly into his deep reading-chair, and leaned his head against the cushioned back, his face looked worn and haggard and old. Even in the soft lamp-light, deep lines were visible across his forehead, and about the corners of his eyes and lips. His eyes had the same anxious, eager expression Ormerod had noticed earlier in the evening. His dark complexion

looked wan and sallow, betokening a loss of the vigorous health of former days. The expression of his mouth would have told an onlooker of average acuteness that in spite of wealth and worldly success he was a bitter and a disappointed man. The five years that had elapsed since that never-to-be-forgotten January night, when he had cruelly taunted and insulted unhappy Tristram Lowry, had brought Le Marchant if not remorse at least regret. Catherine's death and her husband's suicide were events so tragic in themselves that they could hardly fail to make some impression on his mind and heart. The very completeness of his revenge had satisfied—and satiated him. He no longer felt the thirst for vengeance that had tormented him when Catherine avowed her love for Lowry, and thus annihilated every passionate and ambitious hope he had cherished so long. But, though he felt some compunctious twinges of conscience when he thought of the utter ruin he had brought on the woman he once loved, he felt no inclination to trace out Catherine's child and rescue her from poverty. He let the tide of London life sweep her away, without caring whether she kept afloat or was overwhelmed, and so forgotten. What was it to him whether she lived or died?—a child more or less in the world, what did it matter?

This being Le Marchant's state of mind, it may be imagined that when he heard the name of Vivien Lowry, when he heard that she still lived—nay, more, that she had found a friend and protectress in Lady Villebois, it seemed as if she had risen from the grave; as if Catherine's spirit had watched over the fate of her child; as if Nemesis had at last found him out. He had long looked on Vivien as dead. It was still a marvel to him how she, a frail and friendless child, had contrived to hold her own in life's hard battle.

Ever since he had heard that she lived, he had been filled with a haunting dread that she might one day cross his path. He had still a vivid recollection of the curiously disconcerting effect her presence had on him on the single occasion he had seen her; he had not forgotten the glance of mingled aversion and contempt she had

cast on him—strange that such a mere child should have had the power to make him feel ashamed of himself!

"It is not probable that we shall ever meet," he muttered, as he at length roused himself from his gloomy reverie and applied himself to the perusal of the letters and newspapers that had arrived by the afternoon post.

He little knew that Fate, in the person of Lady Villebois, was about to overthrow all his calculations, and that, within a stone's throw of his window, his daughter was busied in entangling still further the complicated skein of his life. Had Sybil stood less in awe of her father, had he ever cared to win her confidence, it is more than probable that she would have told him some of the dreams and fancies she had been indulging in regarding Vivien Lowry; and he would then have heard of Lady Villebois' approaching visit to Grasshire.

Le Marchant had been so accustomed to look on Mordaunt's Rest as a shut-up and deserted abode, that the possibility of its mistress taking it into her head to pay her neglected property a visit had never entered his. Lady Villebois had not lived at Mordaunt's Rest for forty years—it was not likely, he argued, that she would revisit it now.

CHAPTER XI.

A DAMSEL ERRANT.

ORMEROD returned to town in a more satisfied frame of mind than when he left it. He felt assured of the reality of his affection for Sybil, and serenely confident of her affection for himself. It had struck him several times of late that he had been overhasty in proposing to a girl of whom he knew so little; that in doing so he had not acted best for her happiness, or for his own. But, with the sound of Sybil's loving words in his ear, and the remembrance of her tender glances and sweet smiles fresh in his mind, all his doubts vanished. He decided that he was indeed the happiest of men; that those doubts and

fears were, and had always been, utterly groundless; that he and Sybil were the most devoted of lovers, and that, in the future, their married life would be entirely blessed. Perhaps he told himself this with unnecessary iteration—if it were all true. When a man loves with the whole strength of his heart, such self-assurances are needless. But, as has been already intimated, Ormerod was not much given to mental introspection, preferring rather to study the workings of other minds than his own.

Life—now that that stumbling-block of doubt was removed from his path—seemed to stretch brightly before him. He was resolved, since Miss Lowry's presence disturbed the serenity and equal balance of his emotions, to avoid her in future. That was apparently the simplest and wisest plan of action he could pursue. The thought that he must infallibly be brought in contact with her later in the year, when Lady Villebois paid her proposed visit to Mordaunt's Rest, troubled him somewhat. He almost regretted his own share in inducing Lady Villebois to alter her plans, because the extraordinary interest and predetermined affection Sybil felt for the girl whom she had exalted to a heroine would certainly cause her to seek Miss Lowry's society.

A few weeks, nay, a few days ago, Ormerod wished the two girls to meet; now, for some inexplicable reason, he felt strangely averse to it—a feeling of which he felt more than half ashamed, because he coud not question either the goodness of Miss Lowry's heart or the nobility of her character.

"Sybil would fall down and worship her at once. Of that I am certain," he thought; "but whether Miss Lowry would reciprocate the feeling is another question. She is scarcely the woman for enthusiastic girl friendships, I should think; and, though she is the last person in the world to make my poor little Sybil feel her inferiority—still—"

He did not pursue the thought, because he felt that, in admitting his betrothed's inferiority, he had again been guilty of disloyalty to her; so, like many another perplexed and worried mortal, he took refuge in work as a

means of escape from troublesome thoughts. After tussling with a knotty point in Adam Smith for half an hour or so, he warmed to his subject, and for the rest of that day remained immersed in the profundities of political economy.

About six o'clock he came to the surface with a slight headache, and a longing for air and exercise. With the idea that by indulging the latter he would cure the former, he seized his hat and set out for a walk across the Green Park.

It was a hot, stifling afternoon, and even that apology for Nature was refreshing after the rattle of Piccadilly. Suddenly the thought struck him that more air was obtainable near the river, so he crossed St. James's Park, turned down Birdcage Walk, and so on to the Westminster Embankment. There the air was certainly fresher, and Ormerod leaned on the parapet and looked down at the tawny water in a dreamy and contemplative frame of mind. He had nearly a couple of hours to get through before dinner-time; a pleasant mental languor, the result of the long day of study, stole over him; he felt disposed to loiter away those hours in some spot where he would not be likely to meet any one he knew.

In this mood he crossed Westminster Bridge with a vague sort of idea of finding his way to Battersea Park. Like most men who spend the greater part of their lives in London, he had very little practical knowledge of metropolitan geography beyond the limits of the West End. Of that vast city which lies on the Surrey side of the river he knew little or nothing. After half an hour's walking he found himself in a bewildering labyrinth of small, narrow, dirty streets in a locality which he rightly guessed to be Lambeth—a region to which he had certainly never penetrated before.

But, once there, he found his interest aroused. The unsightly tumble-down houses, the wretched-looking squalid people were so at variance with the scenes among which his own lot lay that he felt almost ashamed of his own worldly prosperity. These toil-worn men and women were units in the great sum of London life—units

he had been accustomed to look on as so many difficulties in the path of the political economist. Was not the "why?" of their existence the hardest of all problems to be solved, since they seemed only born to suffer, and sin —and starve?

For the first time—was it the germ of the seed sown by Vivien weeks ago?—he felt and realized that these suffering units were men and women with warm, living, human hearts capable of great good as of great evil; capable of rising out of the slough of misery and degradation in which they now wallowed, if a helping hand were only extended to them before they sank irrevocably. He looked about him with eyes from which a veil seemed suddenly to have fallen, and saw with vivid clearness the depth and width of the chasm which separates the rich from the poor.

"How they must hate us!" he thought, as he glanced about at the groups round the foul-smelling public houses, at the evil-faced, slatternly women, at the pallid, stunted, hollow-eyed children; "by what is called the 'accident of birth,' these people are condemned to a life worse than that of brutes—what wonder that they become brutish when they live in such pig-sties as these!"

He turned down a blind alley, where the houses, or rather hovels, on either side were in such a state of dilapidation and decay as to raise in the mind of the beholder an angry disgust that "such things could be" in a civilized country. All thought of his proposed saunter to Battersea Park had been forgotten. He was determined to explore the whole extent of that region before he left it.

"What a volcano we live on!" he thought. "It speaks well for the endurance of these people that, in sheer desperation, they do not rise and break their chains."

And this was the practical, hard-headed, and utterly unsentimental Felix Ormerod, who a few weeks ago would have laughed to scorn such an idea as that which had just crossed his mind! He was already engaged in planning how the filthy slums about him could be swept away, and how healthy dwellings could be erected in the

place of abominations which only by courtesy could be termed "houses."

So absorbed was he in his calculations that he was perfectly unconscious of the wonder and curiosity such a phenomenon as a well-dressed gentleman excited in the rough-headed, slatternly women, and that a band of ragged children had assembled to watch his movements. Ormerod's appearance in their midst puzzled them profoundly; he was evidently not the School Board officer, the parson, the doctor, or the "taxes." He looked like a "swell" from the West End—a genus the urchins were perfectly familiar with in their rightful element, but here, in the paternal ally, such a visitant was looked on as an intruder, and an unwelcome one to boot.

"Uh! uh! let's pelt 'im, Bill!" muttered a black-browed, scowling imp, who for the last five minutes had been hovering about the outskirts of the crowd, to a rough-headed lad, who seemed to be a sort of leader among them. "Shouldn't I like to see that topper of 'is caved in!"

"So shud I," responded the other, in a fierce whisper, "and I'd loike to tear 'is damned fine coat to tatters!"

"Then let's at 'im—I'm game; there ain't no Bobby in sight; guess they don't often come down 'ere. Per'aps we'll get 'is ticker."

The big boy's wolfish eyes gleamed with the prospect of such spoil; he was ready for anything.

"Come on, boys," he called to his body-guard, which consisted of a dozen or so of the biggest and strongest boys, ranging in age from ten to fifteen. The smaller urchins formed themselves into a reserve corps, and were told off to guard the entrance to the alley, a *cul de sac*, and also to give timely warning in case of a surprise from without.

Ormerod meanwhile, in blissful unconsciousness of the gathering storm, was standing before one of the most dilapidated of the houses, lost in calculations how it could be improved from off the face of the earth, and how a model lodging-house might be erected in its place. It was not until Bill and his lieutenant, backed up by the

aforesaid body-guard, rushed at him with evidently hostile intentions that he awoke to the fact that he was in a very disagreeable, not to say dangerous, predicament. In his then frame of mind an affray of any sort was distasteful to him; he pitied these wretched creatures sincerely, and the last thing he wished was a collision with any of them. Still, when a man is gratuitously assaulted by a dozen sturdy young rascals with a very confused idea of *meum* and *tuum*—for Bill had already made a dash at his watch-chain, with the intention of appropriating the coveted "ticker"—he feels a righteous wrath flame up in him.

Without pausing to think of consequences, Ormerod, with one well-planted blow, sent the acquisitive Bill flying. Two or three of the body-guard were dealt with in the same summary manner, and then Ormerod paused and looked about him. Notwithstanding his temporary advantage, he saw that the situation was certainly not a pleasant one. Hoarse cries resounded through the alley of "Come on, boys!" Then there was a rush of excited tatterdemalions, who swarmed round him gesticulating wildly and yelling out such a torrent of menace, abuse and oaths that for the moment Ormerod was bewildered by the uproar.

The noise at last attracted the attention of some of the inhabitants of the court. Sundry rough heads appeared at the broken windows, but no one attempted to interfere. Such scenes were by no means of rare occurrence in that neighborhood. Ormerod felt more annoyed than angry at the course of events. He saw the ridiculous side of the affair, and yet it might be no laughing matter for him. The original number of the assailants had been strengthened by the sudden advent of half a dozen other lads, who, ever ready for a row, rushed into the thick of the fray yelling out their determination to "do for the swell."

Ormerod, seeing this new danger, shook off half a dozen small boys, who were clinging round him tenaciously, and had already possessed themselves of his purse, cigar-case, and pocket-handkerchief, and contrived to get his

back against the wall of the house nearest to him. Hardly had he succeeded in establishing himself in this strategic position, when a clear voice rang out above the din,

"Boys, what are you doing? Fifty of you against one man. I am ashamed of you!"

The words and the tone in which they were uttered had a magical effect. The boys retreated with one accord, grumbling but abashed. Ormerod looked around in astonishment both at the voice—which had, he thought, a familiar accent—and at the result.

Facing him, standing in the doorway of the house opposite, was a woman, a tall, fair-haired woman, plainly dressed in a black stuff gown and a neat black bonnet. For a moment he could not speak for sheer astonishment. Was he dreaming?

"Miss Lowry!" he said, at length, "you here?"

In another moment he was at her side, and she had given him her hand.

"And fortunately for you that I am here," she said, smiling, and her color deepening.

The boys, who had been fairly taken aback by the suddenness of her appearance, now swarmed round Ormerod again. They were half ashamed of being so easily dissuaded from their purpose of robbing and maltreating one whom they looked on as their enemy, inasmuch as he was well-clad and well-fed, while they were ragged and starving. Bill, who had picked himself up unhurt save for an incipient black eye, pressed forward eagerly, feeling that he had a right to return that blow given him by Ormerod with interest. Vivien, without a moment's hesitation, stepped forward and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Will Rudkin," she said, firmly, "I am not going to let you touch this gentleman."

"'E 'it me, 'e did," grumbled the boy, with a wrathful glance at Ormerod.

"Of course he did—in self-defense," she interrupted, quietly; "wouldn't you hit any one who attacked you unprovoked? Boys," she added, turning to the ragged

crowd, "if you wish to have me for a friend still, you will go home quietly."

The boys looked sullenly at each other and then at Vivien. Her eyes met their angry glances fearlessly; she even smiled at them—the smile seemed to say, "I know you will do what I ask you—to please me," and its influence was even greater than her words.

Ormerod gazed at her in wonder. Was this the same woman he had last seen in Lady Villebois' drawing-room, sitting silent while he talked, and apparently absorbed in some feminine trifle of needlework? How had she come to this pandemonium, and why?

"Miss Lowry," he said, earnestly, "pray let me take you away from this place—it is not right for you to be here—ladies should never venture into such dens."

Vivien smiled gravely.

"Don't be alarmed on my account, Mr. Ormerod. I know these people well, and they know me—and, I believe, trust me. I will go directly," she added, seeing how great his anxiety was on her behalf, "but I must speak to these boys first."

"Will," she said, in a low voice to the boy who had acted as ringleader, "you must give this gentleman back the things you took from him. I can't call any boy my friend who is a thief. Remember that."

Ormerod's property was duly produced, though somewhat unwillingly, and placed in Vivien's hand.

"Is your watch safe, Mr. Ormerod?" she asked, in a whisper.

"Yes."

"Now, Will," she went on, turning again to the crowd, "you, as the ringleader—yes, I know you were the ringleader, because I was watching you all the time from your mother's house," she added, as Bill muttered a sulky denial. "I waited before I interfered, hoping you would all come to your senses. Will, you must beg this gentleman's pardon."

Will rubbed his injured eye, which was already getting discolored, and grumbled out that "he would be blowed if he would."

"I insist upon it," said she, firmly.

"Well, miss, if eez yer young man," said the boy, with a knowing smirk, "I don't ser much mind, if it'll make yer 'appy."

"This gentleman is my friend," said Vivien, simply, though a faint color dyed her pale cheeks, "and I wish you to beg his pardon."

"Pray don't press the matter, Miss Lowry," said Ormerod, who had heard every word of the above colloquy, "I will dispense with the apology."

"You need not. Do you know I am a very obstinate person, Mr. Ormerod? Will is ready to obey me now."

"Beg pardon," said the boy, sulkily; and he darted off to his fellows, who received him with a cheer, and the whole troop rushed away shouting and laughing, and Vivien and Felix were left alone in the court.

"Thank you for your friendly aid, Miss Lowry," he said, in a low voice, "though the usual order of things has been reversed—to think of *you* rescuing *me* from a herd of juvenile savages!"

"Do not think too hardly of them," she said, purposely ignoring all but his last words. "You must make some allowance for the force of example—and then look at their surroundings—why, they live in a state of savagery."

"I hope you don't make a practice of coming among them alone," said he, anxiously, after a few minutes' silence, during which they walked to the end of the court and turned into a dirty narrow street to the left.

"Yes; I come here regularly—three times a week," she replied, quietly.

"Alone?"

"Yes—why not?"

She turned her calm, gray eyes on him with an inquiring glance.

"But do you not run a great risk—? Are you not liable to be attacked, as I was?"

"Oh, no. They look on me as a friend." Then, seeing his astonishment, she added, "You know, Mr. Ormerod—or, perhaps, you don't know?—that, until I met Lady Villebois, I lived among the poor— I was one of them;

for I worked for my living; and, though I was able to earn more money than most of them—because I happened to be rather better educated—I was not so much above them as to be looked on in the light of an enemy. Yes," she went on, sadly, "it is too true that here in London many of the poor *do* look on the rich as their natural enemies."

Ormerod was silent. In a way, her words jarred upon him, though she spoke of her past life without a trace of bitterness or resentment. He could hardly realize, and he hated to think, that the graceful, high-bred woman at his side had "worked for her living" among working people as one of them.

"But why—forgive me if I seem to speak impertinently—why not bury all that? Why not forget the past? Nature never intended you for vulgar toil—and—and since circumstances have happily combined to remove you from so uncongenial a sphere—"

"But," interrupted Vivien, gently, "if I can by my presence cheer the lives of these working people—if I can give them such help as is in my power to give, is it not a duty to come among them?"

It was not easy to answer her, so he got out of the difficulty by putting another question.

"Does Lady Villebois know of these visits?"

"Yes."

"And she approves of them?"

"Heartily approves of them. I am, moreover, her almoner," she added, with a smile, "and no one could have greater pleasure in giving of her abundance than Lady Villebois."

"I am afraid you are both often victimized by impostors," said Ormerod, who had a rooted dislike to what he termed "promiscuous charity."

"I think experience has given me wisdom to discriminate between true and fictitious cases of distress," she answered, quietly.

"Forgive me," he said, feeling that he had said a foolish thing. "Miss Lowry," he added, fixing his eyes on her face, "just now—you gave me the title of friend—

please do not withdraw it now. For the future, will you let me meet you on the footing, not of a mere acquaintance, but of a friend?"

Again a faint blush passed over her cheeks, but her eyes met his frankly, and she said, in a calm voice:

"Oh, yes. Why not? I have so many acquaintances —and so few friends. This evening's adventure shall inaugurate our friendship, Mr. Ormerod."

"That being the case, I am going to claim a friend's privilege, and ask a favor of you."

"What is it?" she asked, with smiling eyes.

"It is that you will not come to Lambeth again—without me."

It was a bold request to make, and, though he experienced some inward trepidation, he felt a good deal of curiosity to see how she would take it. Miss Lowry was so totally unlike the young ladies he was in the habit of meeting that it was impossible to guess whether she would be offended and vexed, or merely indifferent.

"You are very good to feel anxious about me, Mr. Ormerod," she said, looking frankly and gratefully at him; "but I cannot promise to do what you ask. My Lambeth friends have a prior claim on me, and I am afraid they would not feel the same trust in me if I were to visit them otherwise than alone."

Then seeing he looked pained, she added, quickly:

"But why should *you* not make friends with these people, too? They would soon learn to trust you. They are by no means unapproachable, if you do not make the mistake, so many well-meaning people do, of patronizing them."

Ormerod felt somewhat staggered at this suggestion. It was one thing to visit these slums as the self-constituted protector of a beautiful woman, and another to transform himself into a sort of male district-visitor. Vivien saw his look of hesitation, and her face fell.

"You don't care to do this?" she asked, in a disappointed tone.

"I will do anything you wish," he answered, obeying

a sudden impulse. "Anything in the world—if you will only let me be your friend—if only—"

Then feeling he was making an unutterable fool of himself, he paused abruptly, and his eyes eagerly searched Vivien's face. That emotion of some sort stirred her he felt certain, for her lips and eyelids quivered for an instant, and her cheeks turned a shade paler, but in a moment all trace of it had vanished, and her glance met his frankly.

"I have said we are friends," she said, gently; "is not that enough? But," suddenly glancing up at the lofty towers of Westminster—they were then crossing the bridge, and the broad river shone like molten gold in the evening light—"do you know that it is nearly eight o'clock? I must take the first hansom I see and drive back to Chiswick. Lady Villebois will think something dreadful has happened to me."

BOOK THE THIRD.

THE USURPER.

There surely lives in man and beast
Something divine to warn them of their foes;
And such a sense when first I fronted him
Said, "Trust him not." —TENNYSON.

CHAPTER I.

AT MORDAUNT'S REST.

MORDAUNT'S REST was a queer, rambling old house, built in a decidedly "mixed" style of architecture.

At various periods of its history it had been added to, altered, patched up, and renovated according to the tastes of its various owners until it presented the quaint mingling of past and present which was its distinguishing characteristic—a characteristic not, however, without charm. Nothing was easier than for a newcomer to lose

him or herself in the network of narrow winding passages and out-of-the-way nooks and corners which were quite a feature of the house. Doors leading apparently nowhere perplexed the unwary; rooms as small as cupboards, and cupboards as large as rooms, raised in the mind of the beholder doubts as to the sanity of the architect who had planned them. Yet, in spite of the undeniable inconveniences of the place, Mordaunt's Rest had a home-like air—a quality not always met with in country mansions of far greater pretensions.

The position of the building gave it the charm of perfect solitude—so completely was it hidden from view by the thick foliage of the trees which screened it on all sides. In winter or late autumn the place might be dreary in its loneliness, but in August, with the trees still clad in all their summer bravery, with the wide stretch of landscape, visible from the windows, smiling in the sunlight, the silence and solitude were delightful.

One brilliant morning early in the month Mordaunt's Rest suddenly awoke from its long sleep. The windows, that for years had been opened only at rare intervals, stood open to admit the air and sunshine. There was an unusual stir and bustle in and about the house; carpets were taken up and beaten; furniture, long shrouded in brown holland, again stood revealed in its old-fashioned glory of damask and satin and velvet.

In the garden a revolution no less complete was in progress. Weeds were grubbed up; straggling creepers, which in their luxuriance of growth had invaded doorways and darkened casements, were clipped and trimmed, and nailed neatly against the walls.

The old couple who had had charge of the house for so many years that they regarded it to all intents and purposes as their own, looked about them in dismay as if chaos had come again. A small army of women were scrubbing and polishing and dusting indoors, while outside half a dozen men were engaged in doing the minimum of work in the maximum of time, according to the custom of country workmen paid "by the day."

All this general upheaval was the result of a few hur-

riedly written lines from Lady Villebois received by the venerable pair some days since, in which her ladyship announced her intention of visiting Mordaunt's Rest in the course of a few days, and giving order for the general setting-to-rights of the house and grounds.

Expectation was at its height in the village of Foxton when it got abroad that the lady of the manor was about to visit her long-neglected property. It was hoped that good times were coming for the small farmers, for her ladyship would no doubt patronize them to the extent of purchasing their dairy produce—a grand London lady was not likely to "grow" her own eggs and butter—to say nothing of mutton and beef; so the rejoicing extended to the butcher, baker, and proprietor of the "general shop," where everything from bacon to postage stamps and sealing-wax could be purchased. That Lady Villebois would get her groceries from that *bête noire* of the trading community—the Stores, never for a moment entered the heads of the people; they thought too highly of her ladyship for that.

The prospect of additional custom brought quite an element of excitement into the drowsy little place—excitement not unmingled with curiosity, for reports had penetrated even to Foxton that her ladyship was one of the most popular leaders of society in London, and a very great lady indeed. Only the elders of the village could remember her as she was fifty years ago when she came to Mordaunt's Rest as a bride, and for this reason the elders were for the nonce the most important people in the village. Their description of "the Lady"—as she was generally called—was listened to with interest, notwithstanding that a description which spoke of her as the "brightest-eyed, smilingest, pleasantest-spoken young lady you ever set eyes on," was scarcely likely, after an interval of half a century, to be still applicable to her.

The women who had been pressed in as supernumeraries in the work of furniture-polishing, floor-scrubbing, etc., that had been in progress at Mordaunt's Rest a full week, brought various scraps of gossip back to the village—scraps that gave a piquancy to their afternoon cups

of tea just as the choicest scandal does to the daintily-sipped orange pekoe of London kettle-drums. From these women the good people of Foxton learned that "the Lady" was bringing in her train a young woman who was born in a sphere of life but little superior to their own, but who had had the good fortune to attract her ladyship's attention; that the latter had there and then adopted her as a daughter, and, what was more, meant to make her her heiress. This last item of news raised in the villagers quite a *furore* of curiosity to see one who, by such an extraordinary piece of good luck, had been lifted from poverty to wealth.

Consequently, when Lady Villebois and Vivien drove through the village on their way from Compton Magna to Mordaunt's Rest, most of the inhabitants were on the alert to catch a glimpse of the two ladies. A feeble cheer was raised by a score or so of sunburned young sons of the soil, who, with that extraordinary partiality for running after any wheeled vehicle which seems inherent in the juvenile masculine mind, kept abreast of the carriage through the village; while the women, standing at their doorsteps, bobbed deferentially, and forelocks were pulled by such of the male population as the exigencies of field labor allowed to return home to tea.

Tears gathered in Lady Villebois' soft blue eyes as she looked about her to right and left, recognizing the once familiar features of the place—the long, narrow, wedge-shaped stretch of green, called for some unknown reason the Moor, though it was as unlike a moor as anything could be; the group of pine-trees, with their sweet-smelling, blue-green spines sharply defined against the summer sky; the church, gray, ivy-covered, and venerable; the churchyard with its lych-gate; the old oak close by, that was naught but a hollow shell, bound with iron to keep it standing against autumn gales, with only a few sparse, leaf-bearing branches to show that it still felt the influence of spring. Lady Villebois remembered it all.

As one familiar object after another was passed a hundred memories awoke in her, and a very sad look stole over her face. Vivien pressed her friend's hand without

speaking. Having the gift of silent sympathy, which is never unwelcome because never obtrusive, she limited the expression of her feelings to that, and Lady Villebois repaid her with a grateful glance.

The village was soon left behind, and the carriage bowled smoothly along the high-road. Several milestones were passed before the silence between the two women was broken. Vivien still held her friend's hand, but her eyes had plenty of occupation. It was, in fact, her first glimpse of the open country, and the expression of wonder and delight on her face deepened every moment. Every turn of the road was a new revelation of beauty. Whenever a gate or gap in the hedge revealed a glimpse of the wide stretch of fields and woods, she could hardly restrain her delight.

At last they diverged from the high-road, and turned down a deep lane overarched with the spreading branches of tall trees, and bordered on either side by thick hedges festooned with trails of white convolvulus, and fragrant with the delicate sweetness of honeysuckle. Traveler's joy, whose glories of bloom, being past, had "renewed itself in beauty," fluttered its feathery tufts in the breeze; glossy-leaved briony, with plentiful clusters of green berries that a few weeks later would tempt children with their deceptive redness; tangles of blackberry-bushes, with their faint-hued flowers and rich promise of fruit. It was such a picture of luxuriant beauty that a little cry of rapture escaped from Vivien's lips. Lady Villebois, turning to her, and catching the infection of her enthusiasm, smiled brightly; and the cloud of those past bitter memories was dispersed by the sunshine of the mother-love she felt for the girl by her side.

"Oh! how beautiful it is," exclaimed Vivien, glancing round her with beaming eyes. "What glorious space, and light, and grennness!"

"From to-day, I shall see the country through your eyes, my dear. Your enthusiasm is so refreshing. If you rave over a few green fields and hedges, what would you say to the magical distances of the Campagna?"

"I don't think I should admire the Campagna more

than this," replied Vivien, naïvely, "because this is home."

"Perhaps you are right. Perhaps there is as much real beauty in this one green lane as there is in all that southern glow and glitter."

"How happy I shall be at Mordaunt's Rest!" said Vivien, half to herself, after a few minutes' silence.

"I hope you will, my dear."

Vivien looked at her friend with tears in her eyes.

"And I owe all my happiness to you."

Lady Villebois pressed her hand in silence. Those two understood each other so well, that, in moments of great emotion, there was little need for speech between them.

Neither uttered a word until the carriage arrived at the lodge-gates of Mordaunt's Rest. Here another wave of memory swept over Lady Villebóis, but she battled it down; and when, in a few minutes, the house was reached, she could look with composure on the gray, weather-beaten walls that held so many sad recollections.

When she had alighted from the carriage, and crossed the threshold, she turned and kissed Vivien on the cheek.

"Welcome to Mordaunt's Rest," she said, in a low voice. Then she turned to give a kindly greeting to the housekeeper.

In a couple of days, the two ladies felt as much at home as if they had lived at Mordaunt's Rest for years. Vivien reveled in the perfect liberty of the life they led. Callers not having yet made their appearance, they were, for the time, freed from all social duties. While the dew yet pearled the grass, Vivien was up and out, drinking in the wonderful sweetness and freshness of the morning air. She indulged in long walks before Lady Villebois left her room, during which she explored the country for miles round. This extraordinary activity on the part of a town-bred young lady excited much wonder in the breasts of the villagers, with many of whom Vivien had already made friends.

In a week she had familiarized herself with most of the roads and lanes within a radius of two or three miles, and, in her love of exploration for its own sake, she al-

ready contemplated more extended expeditions. Lady Villebois was amused by the accounts Vivien gave her of these morning rambles; she did not disapprove of them, but stipulated that Vivien should take one of the dogs with her as a protector. A noble, dove-colored mastiff—Chevalier by name—was chosen by the latter as her escort, and thenceforth considered as her especial property; and a cordial affection sprang up between mistress and dog.

Morning after morning the two sallied out together, sometimes not returning until midday. The combined effects of air and exercise were already manifest in the glow of health on Vivien's usually pale cheeks, and Lady Villebois was delighted at the change in her appearance.

One of these morning rambles was destined to bring before her in the most startling manner the memory of an incident in her past which neither time nor circumstances had wholly obliterated. For some days she had formed a resolution to walk over to Dalthorpe, a village that had attracted her notice when driving with Lady Villebois because of its picturesque site, and of a certain trim and orderly aspect it had. The brief glimpse she had had of Dalthorpe charmed her. The cottages were so well-built, the gardens so neat, and there was such a pleasant air of prosperity about the place. In this respect it differed widely from some of the neighboring hamlets, which, like Foxton, had suffered from the non-residence of some of the principal landed proprietors.

Lady Villebois felt some qualms of conscience when she noted the flourishing condition of Dalthorpe.

"I wonder who owns the property about here," she said thoughtfully to Vivien, as they drove homeward. "I know next to nothing of the county magnates. My husband cared little for their society, and, though I believe we were duly called on by our neighbors, we were not on terms of friendship with any of them."

That pretty village had ever since haunted Vivien's imagination, and she longed to visit it again. One brilliant August morning she resolved to carry out her intention. It was very early when she awoke, and she flat-

tered herself she would be able to reach Dalthorpe while the first freshness of morning lingered in the air. Dressing herself quickly, she descended to the hall, where a sleepy-looking housemaid was already busy with a broom. Here Chevalier joined her—he always slept on a mat in the hall—and she was soon on her way down the long, winding avenue which led to the lodge-gates.

The sun had hardly risen, and the east was glorious with color; a pale, golden radiance covered the sky to the zenith; a light, white mist hung about the distant landscape. The air was fresh and sweet, and a cool breeze softly stirred the trees, shaking down last night's dew-drops on her head as she passed. The grass by the roadside had liquid diamonds on every blade, and the dark-green ivy-leaves which clustered thick under the hedges shone with moisture. There was no sound but the soft stirring of leaves, the chirping of newly-awakened birds, and the faint hum of insect life always audible to a quick ear. It was a peaceful scene, and the quiet beauty of it touched her with an emotion which brought tears to her eyes—and yet she was not unhappy. No; her heart was in harmony with Nature, and Nature then wore her mildest and serenest aspect.

She thought of many things as she walked: of her childhood; of her early sufferings; of her mother's death; of her own struggles. But her thoughts soon turned from the past; for youth lives in the present, and dreams only of the future. Thoughts of the past are for the old; youth is far too eager to turn back, it presses on, on to the future, for the future promises so fair.

Why should youth glance backward, since what is ahead looks so enchanting?

What Vivien's dreams of the future were need not be set down here. They must have been pleasant, whatever they were, for her lips smiled, and her eyes were full of soft light. She looked so fair, and young, and happy, so full of health and vigor that even the rheumatic old hedge-cutters looked up and gave her good-morning as she passed. The dog trotted at her heels with a solemn dignity, as though he felt the responsibility he incurred

when he constituted himself her protector. Is there not something very beautiful in a dog's affection for a fair woman? Who will deny that that patient, unselfish service has not something of the chivalrous devotion of a knight to his lady? Be that as it may, Chevalier did not belie his name. He loved his mistress, and would have died in her defense.

Mile after mile Vivien walked without thought of fatigue. Her step was light and springing; her graceful, well-developed figure was as supple and strong as that of an Italian *contadina*, because, like hers, it had been allowed to grow as Nature intended it should without the corset-maker's aid.

Dalthorpe was more than five miles distant from Mordaunt's Rest, and by the time Vivien reached the outskirts of the village she felt very hungry. She began to consider where she could get some breakfast. A rustic inn by the roadside, with wide bow-windows and a flapping sign, on which a gaudy presentment of George IV. in all the majesty of his furred coat and clustering curls was depicted with the lavishness of color peculiar to the sign-painter's art, seemed the likeliest place; and Vivien, not being oppressed with that horror of offending the proprieties which haunts the minds of most young ladies, boldly entered and asked for breakfast. She was shown into a neat, old-fashioned parlor looking out into the village street, and in a few minutes tea, bread-and-butter, and the freshest of new-laid eggs were placed before her.

The meal dispatched, she found on looking at her watch that it was but eight o'clock. She resolved to spend an hour or so in walking about the village. She asked for her bill, which was duly presented to her by the landlady in person, who, having heard of the advent of a very handsome young lady, accompanied by an equally handsome dog, was resolved to see and judge for herself whether this eccentric damsel was or was not a stranger to the neighborhood. Having satisfied herself on this point, she felt a pardonable curiosity to know who the strange young lady might be; but Vivien, not perceiving the drift of her remarks, answered her questions briefly,

and bade the disappointed landlady good-morning with so bright a smile that the worthy woman forgave her on the spot.

"What a beautiful young lady! I never saw her like," she soliloquized, following Vivien's retreating figure with her eyes. "John was right. I never set eyes on any one like her. But I should like to know her name, and where she comes from. I'll warrant she's a lady born; she looks it every inch."

Meanwhile Vivien, perfectly unconscious of the curiosity she had excited, pursued her way through the village, looking about her with bright, eager eyes as she went.

She was mentally comparing Dalthorpe with the Lambeth slums, the horrors of which seemed more revolting when viewed in the light of her present surroundings. Ah! if she could give those pale-cheeked, hollow-eyed children—children without one of the characteristic graces of childhood—homes such as these! And then she sighed, for she realized her powerlessness to relieve the sufferings she pitied. Without money, her sympathy could take no practical shape. For the first time in her life she sighed for wealth

She was so busy in planning what she would like to do for those Lambeth friends of hers—she always thought of them as friends—that she walked on at random with eyes cast on the ground, quite oblivious of the fact that she had diverged from the highway. At last she roused herself from her reverie and looked about her. She was in a winding, narrow road and the village was quite out of sight. Her intention had been to make a detour, and so find her way back to the road which led to Mordaunt's Rest. But while she had been thinking about the Lambeth people she had forgotten all about herself and her whereabouts; and when she stood still to reconnoiter her position she found that she had lost herself in good earnest. There was nothing for it but to walk on until she met some one who could direct her.

The road in which she found herself was bordered on the left by a tall hedge, on the right by a stone wall about

six feet high. The hedge was too thick to see through and the wall was too high to see over, so she had little chance of discovering in which direction Dalthorpe lay. By and by she came to a place where two roads met. There was no way-post to direct her, and a nearer view showed that the road which branched off at right angles was only a narrow lane. She paused for a moment in doubt. Should she keep straight on, or run the risk of following the windings of a lane which probably led nowhere? After hesitating a little she resolved on adopting the first alternative. The high stone wall to her right might lead to a dwelling of some sort—a lodge-gate most likely, for the wall probably inclosed grounds of some extent.

She walked on patiently for another quarter of an hour, feeling just a little wearied at the monotony of the road. At last a narrow opening appeared in the long continuity of that solid stone wall—she was beginning to think the gray, wearisome line would never end. A stile of formidable height was placed in the opening. She paused, leaned her arms on the topmost bar, and gazed curiously over into the jealously shut-in domain.

A narrow pathway wound across what must be a park of some extent, for the wide expanse of turf, broken by clumps of noble trees, stretched away as far as her eye could reach. The path was probably a short cut to the village; it must be meant for public use, or the stile would not be there. At any rate she would not be trespassing, and the narrow winding path looked very inviting after the dull monotony of the road she had been following for the last half-hour.

With Vivien, to decide was to act. In another moment she had climbed the stile and was walking rapidly across the park.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE RETREAT.

A CHANGE had come over the weather since Vivien left the inn. Light clouds had stealthily crept up over the sky, and the sun was hidden behind a thick vaporous haze. The day, which had promised so fairly, threatened to belie its promise. The heat had become unpleasantly oppressive, for the wind had fallen; a sullen, ominous silence brooded over the landscape. Every moment the sky grew darker, and a bank of heavy purple clouds lay along the horizon.

Vivien looked anxiously about her, and then up at the threatening sky. There was not a sign of any human habitation in sight; she was dressed in a thin summer gown; and she had not even the poor shelter of an umbrella. If a thunder-storm came on she would be drenched to the skin, unless she ran the risk of taking refuge under the trees. It was not a pleasant prospect, and she quickened her pace in the hope of reaching some place of shelter before the storm broke. The dog followed her with bent head and drooping tail; he, too, felt the depressing influence of the sudden change in the weather. Heavy drops of rain now began to fall, and there was a distant rumble of thunder from the purple cloud-bank.

At that moment, she saw to her joy a small stone building half hidden behind a group of trees. Another rumble of thunder, louder this time, was followed by a vivid flash of lightning, and then the rain dashed down in good earnest. Vivien quickened her pace to a run, and made straight for the welcome shelter.

The building, a small edifice only one story high, stood in a garden of some extent, encircled by a light iron railing; but fortunately the gate which led into this inclosure stood open. It was not a moment to stand on ceremony. The rain was now descending in torrents, and lightning flashes shot from the black clouds in quick succession.

She passed the gate and ran to the door, which was

provided with an ample porch. But the rain dashed in, and she soon found this refuge very unsatisfactory. She must seek shelter within the building until the storm ceased. As neither bell nor knocker was visible, she rapped smartly on the stout oak paneling with her knuckles. There was no answer; the building was apparently uninhabited. Again she paused, hesitating. The door had a lock and a stout ring of twisted iron evidently intended as a handle. A dash of rain against her neck and shoulders decided her; she turned the handle. The door opened inward, revealing a small anteroom, leading by a curtain-draped arch to a larger apartment beyond. A single glance into the interior showed her that her surmise was correct: the building was uninhabited; and, judging from the dust and cobwebs which covered everything, had been so for a considerable time. Prompted by a feeling of mingled curiosity and wonder, she pushed aside the heavy red curtains which draped the arch, and looked in. This inner room was of considerable size, with two windows; but so thickly were they overgrown with ivy that the daylight they admitted was reduced to a minimum. The rain beat furiously against the panes, shutting out all view of the outer world. Vivien proceeded to examine the room with much interest.

Chevalier had already stretched himself on a moth-eaten fur rug spread before the empty hearth, and was busily engaged in licking the moisture from his coat. She felt glad of the dog's companionship, for the room had a chill, eerie feeling. She patted his head affectionately. Chevalier wagged his tail in gratitude for the caress, and then resumed his occupation. The room had evidently been well furnished at one time, though everything was now dropping to pieces from the mingled effects of damp and neglect. The handsome Turkey carpet was covered with dust, and was moth-eaten in places. An open cottage-piano stood in one corner, but when Vivien touched the yellow keys no sound came. The damp had ruined the instrument. An easel, and several paintings in various stages of progress, occupied a prominent position

near one of the windows, but all were so coated with dust that she hesitated to touch any of them.

The room had evidently been used as a studio at some distant time, for there was a litter of brushes and paint-tubes on a table by the easel. Curious that it should be given over to ruin and decay! She fell to wondering who had last used the neglected room, and why it had been allowed to fall into such a state of dilapidation. Perhaps it was one of those mysterious buildings which lie under a ban as being "haunted." Had some tragedy been enacted within those walls? some dreadful crime been committed there? She shuddered as she glanced nervously around. Perhaps some visible traces of the crime remained—she had read of such things in the old-fashioned romances she had devoured in her childhood. There might be half-obliterated blood-stains on that dusty carpet. Again she asked herself, with a palpitating heart, to whom had the room belonged?

Some books were scattered on one of the tables. The rain still dashed furiously against the latticed windows; the thunder pealed, and the lightning flashed at intervals. It was evident she must avail herself of her present shelter for some time longer, for the storm showed no sign of abating. She must shake off her nervous fancies, and make the best of the position. The books would serve to while away the time. As they, as well as the building itself, seemed left open for the benefit of any one who chose to inspect them, she took up one of the volumes at random, and idly turned the leaves. It was an early edition of some of Tennyson's poems, and she began to read one of the shorter pieces. But, though her eyes scanned the page, the sense of what she read did not reach her mind. A curious feeling of prescience stole over her. Again she glanced nervously round the room, shivering with a vague dread. The book she had been trying to read slid from her hand, and fell to the floor. She stooped mechanically to pick it up.

The book had fallen open at the title-page, and her eye glanced on an inscription there:

"To Catherine, from Tristram Lowry."

A tremor seized her as she read. The book had belonged to her mother!

Was she dreaming? She glanced wildly round the room, at the piano, at the easel, at the faded furniture, the scattered books and paintings. Had this room belonged to her mother? With trembling hands she turned over the other books. Many of them bore the initials C. D. stamped in the leather; others had the name of Catherine Dallas written in full on the fly-leaf. Dallas—yes, that was her mother's maiden name. She remembered it now perfectly, and the story of her mother's early life. Was she then now actually within the precincts of her grandfather's property? A thousand bewildering thoughts surged through her brain. This room had been her mother's!

A vague feeling of terror stole over her. The room in the semi-darkness looked phantasmal, dream-like, unreal. She put her hand to her head. A dizziness came over her; she staggered, and would have fallen had she not grasped the table to steady herself. Faint and sick, she dropped into a chair, and covered her face with her trembling hands. Her heart was beating wildly, her throat felt constricted; for a moment she was fairly overcome. But she was too healthy in body and mind to be hysterical. Soon, by a strong effort, she mastered her emotion and rose to her feet.

She was resolved to examine minutely every part of the building in the hope of alighting on some relic of the past which might throw light on the mystery of that room. Obeying this new impulse, and careless of the dust which soiled her gloves and dress, she carefully and reverentially cleansed the unfinished paintings with her handkerchief. Had not her mother's hands touched those canvases and made them sacred? This room had been her mother's studio—she no logner doubted it. Long forgotten words spoken by that beloved mother seemed ringing in her ears. She remembered many little evidences of former wealth treasured by her until forced by grim poverty to part with them. She recalled that message intrusted to her the day before her mother's death

—the message which had never been given! "Ask my father to forgive me for the sake of the love he once bore me." What a pitiful prayer for forgiveness! Surely it would have been granted if— The tears rose to her eyes as she thought of it. Ah! if the message had been given, her mother might not have died; her father would not have found a grave in the dark river. . . . Who was answerable for their deaths? Her grandfather? No—Vivien was too just to lay the blame there. That pitiful prayer for forgiveness had never reached his ears . . .

At that moment Chevalier sprang up and gave vent to a suppressed growl. Footsteps sounded on the gravel outside, and Vivien, startled out of her painful reverie by the dog's sudden movement, listened breathlessly. The footsteps drew nearer; some one was evidently approaching the building—possibly to seek shelter, as she had done, for the rain still fell heavily. She rose in some trepidation. The iron handle of the door was turned by an impatient hand. A rush of cool air and the sound of rain beating on the flagged pavement of the anteroom told that some one had entered the building.

CHAPTER III.

FACE TO FACE.

CHEVALIER broke into a deep-mouthed bark as the red curtains, which hung over the arch, were hastily pushed aside, and a tall, thin, dark-eyed man stood in the opening. The dog sprang forward with a bound. Vivien quieted him with a touch of her hand on his head and a gentle word; then she turned and faced the newcomer.

He seemed thunderstruck, and for a moment stood staring at her in dead silence. Vivien felt painfully embarrassed by his fixed gaze, and said, timidly:

"I fear I am intruding here, but the rain drove me to seek shelter, and, finding the door unlocked, I ventured to enter, and—"

She had assumed that the thin, dark man had a right of proprietorship in the place, and she felt obliged to make some excuse for trespassing there.

"It is of no consequence—pray don't distress yourself," he interrupted. "I was somewhat startled at finding this room occupied, that is all."

The words were spoken not unkindly, but at the sound of his voice she started and gazed wildly at him. The face had aged considerably; the eyes had lost their keen brightness, the iron mouth and jaw had lost something of their firmness, but she recognized him. His voice had given her the clew. It was her mother's enemy, and she met him here—here, in her mother's room!

The look of repulsion on Vivien's face, an indefinable something in her manner, revealed as if by some magical intuition who she was. He remembered how and where he had seen her last. He saw in his mind's eye a pale, childish, delicate face looking at him across the years, with the expression of dislike, almost a loathing, it had worn that cold January night.

"Good God!" he panted, gazing wildly at her, "who are you?"

"Vivien Lowry."

"I knew it—I knew it—Catherine's child!" And he muttered in a deeper tone, and so low that the words did not reach Vivien's ear, "And Catherine's avenger."

"You remember me?" he said, after a moment's silence, broken only by the heavy drip of the rain—"you know my name?"

"I know *you*—I forget your name."

"I am Bernard Le Marchant—of Dallas Towers," he added, in a tone of half-cynical mockery.

"Then my grandfather—"

"Is dead, and I am his heir."

He watched her narrowly as he uttered the latter half of the sentence, but he saw no evidence of disappointment or baffled ambition on her face. She only looked quietly at him, with a touch of scorn in her glance.

"Then you reaped the reward of your treachery."

"My treachery! A hard word, young lady. I fail to see that it is applicable to me."

"I do not reproach you," she said, calmly—"I leave that to your conscience. But did you not usurp my mother's place? Do you not enjoy the wealth that should have been hers?"

"If she chose to disobey her father's express commands in marrying a beggarly—"

"Hush!" said Vivien, sternly, "no word against my father."

"Well—you are right, perhaps. *De mortuis*, etc. But, to speak plainly, your mother married against her father's wish, and she reaped the reward of her disobedience."

"She repented," said Vivien, eagerly; "she begged her father to forgive her with her dying breath. Surely, surely he would not have refused to pardon her, if—"

"If *I* had not interfered?" he suggested.

She bowed her head. For a moment her voice failed her, and then she went on bravely:

"Her father would surely have listened to her otherwise. He must. He could not so have hardened his heart against her. Oh, why—why did you hate her so? What had she done to *you*, that you should be so bitter against her that even now—now after her death—you speak unkindly of her?"

Le Marchant's face darkened.

"I loved her."

"You loved her?"

"Yes."

"And yet—"

"And yet I hated her. Don't you know that the bitterest hate is that which has once been love?"

She looked at him with a new expression in her face—one almost of compassion. He looked so haggard, so bitter, so disfigured by the malignancy that betrayed itself in the working of his thin lips. She pitied him.

"Do not speak so bitterly," she said, gently; "my mother did not willfully wound you. She was so loving, so—"

"I know what you would say," he interrupted, roughly.

"I daresay she was angelic to every one else, but she spoiled my life. I can't be expected to sing her praises. Come, Miss Lowry," he added, with an effort, "we had better let bygones be bygones. It is useless to harp on that old string. We won't talk any more of the past, let us talk about the present."

"What is there to talk about?" she said, indifferently.

"Then you don't mean to lay claim to your grandfather's estates?"

He looked furtively but keenly at her. He was beginning to recover from the shock given him by her sudden appearance in that place—the place of all others which was memory-haunted to him. With characteristic astuteness, he was resolved to take the opportunity of finding out how the land lay. He wanted to know if she had any idea of disputing his title to the property; if she had any definite plans of her own; whether she suspected him or merely disliked him.

"*I?* What claim should I have?" she said, looking wonderingly at him.

There was genuine surprise on her face. He turned away with a muttered exclamation which she did not catch.

"There is no knowing what ideas people may not take into their heads," he said aloud, with pretended indifference, though his eyes were still riveted anxiously on her face; "some people will snatch at any straw."

"I have no idea of claiming what is not mine; and, as you have declared yourself the owner of my grandfather's estates—"

"You conclude that they are rightfully mine. Your judgment is correct, Miss Lowry. The Dallas estates were bequeathed to me by my late uncle."

Again there was a brief silence between them, during which he continued to watch her face narrowly. There was a strange, half-mocking smile on his lip as he did so.

"I am going to beg one of your possessions from you," she said, glancing round the room sadly. "I suppose this building and its contents are legally yours?"

"Yes."

"Then will you give me this book?" she said, a sudden rush of tears dimming her eyes as she held out the little Tennyson. "It was my mother's. See, there is her name in it. It was given to her by my father."

"And that is all you ask of me?" he said, with another of his strange smiles. "Your request is granted, Miss Lowry."

"Thank you."

"I would gladly do something more for you, if you would allow me," he said, in a softer voice. Her words and her grateful look had touched him. "I am a rich man, Miss Lowry—and, in a manner, we are relations—distant relations, indeed—but still, of the same blood. Will you accept a suitable provision from me?"

"Do you mean, will I take money from you?' she said, the color flaming into her cheeks.

"Why not? We are relatives. I would gladly settle an annuity upon you—of course, on the condition that you promise not to engage in any useless litigation regarding the estates."

"I have told you already that I make no such claim," she replied, with some heat. "The proposition you make is quite unnecessary. I want for nothing. If I did," she added, proudly, "I hope I am capable of earning my own living—it would not be the first time I have done so."

Le Marchant winced, but her indignation did not deter him.

"But," he persisted, eagerly, "there is no necessity for such a thing. I am quite ready, nay, I am anxious to provide for you—on your signing a deed relinquishing all claim to the estates," he added, cautiously.

"I repeat, I make no such claim."

"But you may do so—a woman often changes her mind."

"I shall not change mine; and I cannot accept your money. Lady Villebois—"

"Lady Villebois may tire of her *rôle* of lady-protectress. I have heard she is capricious."

"I will risk that."

"I see you pin your faith to her. Well, if she ever fails you, apply to me."

"That I shall never do," she said, firmly.

"I am sorry you rebuff my friendly advances. I sincerely wish you well; and I would be your friend, if you would let me."

He spoke eagerly, as if he were really anxious to conciliate her—as indeed he was. Her appearance in the neighborhood was an unforeseen danger, which he was anxious to neutralize, if possible, by ingratiating himself with her. But Vivien made no reply. She could not yet overcome her repugnance to him, in spite of his avowed good-will toward herself, and she certainly could not bring herself to accept his offered friendship.

"You are staying with Lady Villebois, in this neighborhood?" he said, tentatively.

"Yes; at Mordaunt's Rest."

"We are near neighbors, then; and we shall probably meet in society. Will it not be better for us to meet on a friendly footing?"

Again that odd feeling of prescience stole over her. She shrank instinctively from the prospect of meeting these people, and she resolved to avoid them as much as possible. She was silent, and Le Marchant continued:

"I fail to understand your distrust of me, Miss Lowry. The past cannot be undone. Why not do as I say, and let bygones be bygones? Come," he said, holding out his hand, with a forced smile, "the rain has stopped and the sun is coming out. Will you let me escort you part of your way home?—or, better still," he added, quickly, "to the Towers, where my wife and daughter will be charmed to make your acquaintance. You must be tired after your long walk—by-the-by, I suppose you walked here?—and Mordaunt's Rest is a good seven miles off."

"Is it indeed so far?" she said, purposely ignoring the first part of his speech. "Then I must hurry back at once. Lady Villebois—"

"I will send a messenger over to Mordaunt's Rest, if you will take luncheon at the Towers. Mrs. Le Marchant will drive you back later in the afternoon. Come,

Miss Lowry, don't refuse, or I shall think you bear malice."

She still felt reluctant; but it struck her suddenly that if she accepted his invitation she would have less of his society than if she were forced to endure his escort for any part of that seven miles' walk, when it would be impossible to get rid of him unless he chose to relieve her of his presence. The unconventionality of the proposed visit to the Towers troubled her not one whit. If she were to be brought in contact with these people, it mattered nothing to her whether she made their acquaintance in a formal or informal manner. Le Marchant read signs of relenting on her face.

"Come," he said, persuasively, "surely you will not carry your resentment so far that you refuse to eat of my bread and salt?"

"No," she answered, simply, "it is not that. But—but Dallas Towers was once my mother's home, and—"

"I don't accept that as a valid excuse. I am sure you do not give way to such sentimental fancies—you are too sensible by half. It will give me great pleasure to see you at the Towers. Why refuse such a very simple request?"

"Very well; I will grant it, out of gratitude for your gift of this book."

She took up the little volume of Tennyson with rather a sad smile, and moved toward the door. Le Marchant followed her in silence, but with an inscrutable smile on his dark face.

CHAPTER IV.

SYBIL AND VIVIEN.

AND so it was that Vivien Lowry crossed the threshold of the home that should have been hers—with the usurper at her side.

She passed through the Gothic hall that had so often echoed her mother's step; she entered the long, many-windowed drawing-room that had once been made

brighter by her mother's presence. She gazed on the noble avenue, on the wide stretch of park. And all this was her mother's forfeited inheritance—the inheritance she had cast away for Tristram Lowry's sake! Dead and gone Dallases looked down from their tarnished frames on their fair-haired young descendant, a stranger in the home of her fathers.

Le Marchant watched her curiously as he led her through the various rooms to his wife's boudoir, a small and daintily-furnished apartment at the further end of the suite of drawing-rooms.

Mrs. Le Marchant received her with languid politeness. She was too well-bred to show her astonishment at the *sans facon* way in which her husband introduced her as "Miss Lowry, a young relation of mine, whom I had the good fortune to find trespassing in the park, and whose acquaintance you will, I know, be charmed to make."

Vivien took the lady's extended hand with a smile, but the calm scrutiny of Selina's cold gray eyes had a somewhat disconcerting effect on her, and the polite little speech she had framed was frozen on her lips. But any momentary awkwardness on her part was quickly covered by Sybil, who, on hearing her name, had risen from the low seat where she sat idly turning over the leaves of a new novel.

"Are you really Vivien Lowry?" she cried, impulsively.

"Yes," answered the other, smiling gravely down on the bright *mignonne* face raised to hers.

"Oh, I am so glad to know you. I have longed to see you for ages."

Vivien looked slightly puzzled.

"You have heard of me before?" she asked, wonderingly.

"Oh! yes, often—from—from a friend of ours," said Sybil, with a blush.

"You must excuse my daughter, Miss Lowry," put in Mrs. Le Marchant, icily, "she is so childish and impulsive."

"Don't listen to mamma," whispered Sybil, pressing her new friend's hand; "you will let me love you, won't you?"

Vivien felt touched by her earnestness; she returned the pressure of the small fingers, but made no audible reply.

Le Marchant, who had a theory of his own that "women," as he expressed it, "were best left to fight out their own battles," had quitted the room; and the three ladies were left to make each other's acquaintance until the luncheon-gong sounded. Selina already looked with some disfavor on her guest. Vivien's extreme beauty was alone sufficient to make her objectionable to that lady, and Sybil's warm words of greeting had vexed her greatly. She was, besides, quite at a loss to understand why her husband wished to be civil to this newly-discovered relative, who had, so to speak, dropped from the skies. She hated mysteries in which she was not initiated, and she was resolved to keep this handsome Miss Lowry at a distance until her social status should be definitely settled.

The story told by Felix Ormerod had not made the same impression on her as on Sybil, consequently she did not for the moment recall it on hearing Vivien's name. Her husband had spoken of her as a relative—no doubt she was only a "poor relation," and, as such, a person to be sedulously snubbed and "kept in her place." With these ideas in her head, Mrs. Le Marchant began a series of artful maneuvers to find out all that was to be found out about her guest. She motioned Vivien to take a seat by her.

"Are you a near relative of my husband's?" she began, sweetly. "I don't remember having heard your name before."

Vivien colored sensitively.

"No," she said, quietly, "I think I can hardly claim to be called a relation."

"But you *are* a relation," interpolated Sybil, eagerly, "for I heard papa say so. I am so glad, for I have so few relations I care about."

Vivien looked gratefully across at the speaker; she felt irresistibly drawn to this large-eyed, soft-voiced maiden—there was something so winning in her innocent enthusiasm, something so lovable in her gentle affectionateness of manner.

"Thank you, Miss Le Marchant," she said, simply. "I, too, have few relations—none, indeed, so far as I know."

"Indeed!" remarked Selina, raising her light eyebrows. "How very odd! But of course, dear Miss Lowry, you are not speaking seriously."

"I am quite serious. No doubt I have relations, but I hardly realize their existence because I have never seen them."

"But," put in Sybil, smiling, "you have seen me, and I mean to claim you as a cousin, whether you like it or not."

Sybil had listened to her mother's cool cross-questioning with secret anger, and she longed to carry off her new-found friend to her own room upstairs, where they could talk confidentially without interruption from Mrs. Le Marchant. She drew closer to Vivien and slid her hand caressingly into hers.

"You will let me be your friend, won't you?" she whispered, coaxingly.

Mrs. Le Marchant frowned.

"Are you making a long stay in Grasshire, Miss Lowry?" she asked, resuming her interrogation with the quiet persistence of one who is resolved to have her own way.

"I don't know," replied Vivien; "it depends entirely on Lady Villebois."

"Oh, Lady Villebois!" repeated Selina, in astonishment; "are you staying with her?"

"I live with her—she is the kindest friend I have."

For a moment the elder lady stared stupidly at her, then gradually it dawned upon her that this handsome young woman must be the *protégée* of whom Ormerod had spoken.

Here was a new phase in the mystery. She remembered the whole story now. Ormerod had said that Lady Villebois had discovered the girl in a second-hand bookshop, and yet Bernard had spoken of her as a relation! Mrs. Le Marchant shuddered; it was really too dreadful.

Fortunately at that moment the luncheon-gong sounded, and she was saved from the necessity of pursuing the

conversation with this plebeian young woman. Luncheon passed off without any untoward reference to Vivien's antecedents. Mr. Le Marchant talked to her on ordinary topics with more animation than usual. Selina was puzzled by the evident deference with which her taciturn and somewhat gloomy husband listened to their guest's remarks. She was resolved to take the first opportunity of questioning him on the subject of this "young person's" kinship; Selina would no longer vouchsafe her the title of lady—a bookseller's assistant, forsooth!

Luncheon happily ended, Sybil took possession of Vivien, and carried her up to her own particular sanctum for the confidential talk for which her soul yearned.

"There!" she said, triumphantly, when she had established Vivien in the most comfortable chair the room contained, and settled herself on a footstool at her feet. "I have got my wish at last!" she remarked, with a sigh of satisfaction. "You can't think how I have longed to have you for my friend, Miss Lowry—may I call you Vivien? Miss Lowry sounds so formal," she added, looking up shyly, "and Vivien is such a pretty name."

"Please do."

"Then you must call me Sybil—is that agreed?"

"Certainly, if you wish it."

"Very well, then; you are Vivien and I am Sybil. No stiff Miss Lowry and Miss Le Marchant for the future, mind! Do you know, I have never had a girl-friend. I have longed for one so, but none of the girls about here are what I call sympathetic. I daresay you think I am a very foolish creature to talk like this to you."

"Indeed, I don't. It is very natural that you should wish for a friend, though," she added, smiling, "you might find a wiser one than myself."

"I don't think so," asseverated Sybil; "though we have met to-day for the first time, I seem to have known and loved you for ever so long—ever since Felix first mentioned you to me," she added, blushing and drooping her eyes.

Vivien started slightly.

"Felix!" she said, in a low voice. "Who is he?"

"Felix Ormerod," said Sybil, with that soft, lingering intonation a woman's voice takes when she utters her lover's name, "the—the man to whom I am engaged."

A slight shade passed over Vivien's face, but it had gone before Sybil raised her eyes.

"He has so often talked to me of you," she went on. "That is why, when I heard your name to-day, and looked in your face, I felt quite as if we were old friends. Did he ever talk to you of me?"

Vivien felt her color rise, but she answered, steadily:

"Mr. Ormerod and I did not meet very often, and—"

"Then he never told you how much I longed to know you?" interrupted Sybil, in a tone of vexation.

"No."

"Then I think he has been very unkind, and I shall be very angry with him when he comes to the Towers again."

"Pray don't—not on my account, at least," said Vivien, hurriedly.

"Oh, but I shall! I like scolding Felix," said the other, laughing. "But, do you know, Vivien, that you have been very remiss—you have never congratulated me on my engagement."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Le Marchant—"

"Sybil, if you please. I won't be Miss Le Marchant to you."

"I beg your pardon, Sybil, and I heartily wish you every happiness," said Vivien, earnestly.

"I was only joking," laughed the girl, looking up roguishly in the other's face. "I don't care a pin for formal congratulations."

"But mine are not formal; they are really sincere. I do wish you and Mr. Ormerod to be very happy."

"You are a dear!" cried Sybil, impulsively, jumping up and kissing her new friend.

Vivien returned the kiss warmly, and the two girls felt that a seal had been set to their friendship.

"And now," said Sybil, when she had resumed her former position at Vivien's feet, "I want you to tell me what you think of Felix. Isn't he *nice?*" she asked, with an expressive stress on the adjective.

"He is very clever," answered Vivien, evasively.

"Yes; and very good-looking, and distinguished, too. Don't you think so?" the other went on, anxiously, as if she longed to hear a confirmation of her own verdict on Felix Ormerod's perfections.

"Yes; I suppose he is."

Sybil looked slightly disappointed at this faint acquiescence. Vivien saw the look, and hastened to add:

"Mr. Ormerod enjoys the good opinion of people far more competent to judge him than I am. Lady Villebois, for instance, thinks most highly of him."

"Does she? Then I am sure I should like her!"

"I am sure you would," said Vivien, greatly relieved at this new turn of the conversation. "When you have seen her, you will more than 'like' her. She is the dearest, kindest creature in the world!"

"You love her?"

"Indeed, I do. She is the only real friend I have in the world."

"Oh, Vivien, you have left me out!" cried Sybil, reproachfully.

"I won't offend again," said Vivien, smiling.

"You don't care for *my* friendship."

"Indeed—indeed, I do. But Lady Villebois has been like a mother to me. I owe everything to her."

"Yes," said Sybil, softly, "Felix told me about it." Then, fearing she had said more than she ought, she colored painfully and looked distressed.

"Dear Sybil," said Vivien, gently, laying her hand on the girl's curly head, "don't think I am foolishly sensitive on the score of my early poverty. I am not at all ashamed of the position I occupied before I met Lady Villebois. I do not feel that the mere fact of my having been compelled to earn my living, when you were yet in the nursery, renders me an unfit companion for you now."

"No, indeed," cried Sybil, indignantly, "you cannot think that I ever dreamed of such a thing! Unfit! Why, I feel every moment how much cleverer and better and more beautiful you are than I! Why," she added, glancing at a long strip of looking-glass let into the wall oppo-

site, "just look what an insignificant little nobody I appear by you!"

The mirror reflected a picture that was charming if only as an exemplification of the beauty of contrast. Vivien's fair and stately loveliness, though of a far higher and grander type than Sybil's rosy prettiness, lacked the piquant charm of coquetry which the latter possessed in such perfection.

"Ah, Sybil, you are a little coquette, and a little flatterer, too," said Vivien, smiling, as her eyes followed Sybil's and rested on the mirror.

"Indeed, I am not," said the girl, pouting in a manner that would have been simply distracting to a male looker-on. "I *do* think you are the most beautiful girl I have ever seen. Mr. Ormerod told me how handsome you were, but I did not expect to see any one so—so—"

She paused, at a loss for a word strong enough to express her admiration. Vivien blushed slightly, and then laughed lightly, as the best means of covering her confusion.

"No compliments, Sybil, if we are to be really friends," she said, patting the dimpled hand which rested on her knee; "but now, ought we not to go downstairs? Mrs. Le Marchant will think me quite a Goth if I am so shockingly neglectful of one of the elementary canons of good taste: politeness toward one's hostess."

Sybil laughed, and made a little saucy grimace.

"Oh! my dear child, when you know mamma better you will find that the companionship of her fan, her eyeglass and her scent-bottle is quite sufficient for her happiness."

It was a bitter speech for so young a girl, and Vivien saw with pain that it was uttered not in jest, but in sober earnestness.

"I am sorry to hear you speak like that of your mother," she said, in a tone of gentle reproof. "Oh! Sybil," she went on, the tears rising to her eyes, "you can never realize how sweet a mother's love is until you lose it."

"A mother's love!" echoed Sybil, sadly. "I hardly know what it is—and yet I have tried to make my moth-

er love me—ever so little; and I have tried hard to be a dutiful daughter; but, oh! if she were not so cold and so worldly—"

"Hush, hush, dear," murmured Vivien, lightly laying her hand on the other's lips. "She *is* your mother, remember. Don't speak words you may live to repent bitterly."

"Very well, then, I won't. I will leave you to form your own opinion of mamma's character," said Sybil, linking her hand in Vivien's arm as the latter rose, and moved toward the door. "We will go down to the drawing-room now, if you like, though I don't see why you should be in such a hurry to get away from me. I mean you to be *my* friend; and when you come to the Towers I shall monopolize you completely—so there!"

CHAPTER V.

REFLECTIONS.

It was not until late that night, when Vivien was back at Mordaunt's Rest, and in the privacy of her own room, that she was able to think quietly over the strange events of the day. Incident had followed incident, emotion had succeeded emotion so rapidly that she had not been able to analyze her feelings, or to realize the extraordinary disclosures that had been the result of her meeting with Le Marchant. The discovery of the mysterious enemy who had long haunted her imagination, and the elucidation of much that had perplexed her regarding the motive of his conduct toward her parents were events of so much importance as to give her active mind plenty of food for thought.

But, when to these were added others which bore more directly on her own fate, Vivien felt fairly bewildered. Le Marchant's evident wish to conciliate her puzzled her considerably; his carefully assumed cordiality impressed her with a vague feeling of distrust and dislike. She could not reconcile his present behavior with his past

conduct. The scene of her father's humiliation had never been forgotten by her; the cruel smile on Le Marchant's lips as he taunted and insulted one whom the world had treated so hardly was still vividly remembered. How could a man who had thus looked and spoken be sincere in the friendliness he assumed toward herself?

She felt uneasy, almost unhappy, as she thought of these things. Perhaps she was unjust; perhaps this man was genuinely sorry for the misery he had caused; perhaps he really wished to atone, by kindness, to the child for the injury he had done the mother. It was a difficult matter to decide, and Vivien resolved to confide the whole affair to Lady Villebois, whose keener brain and greater knowledge of the world were more fitted to cope with the difficulties of the case. She had had, as yet, no opportunity of seeking her friend's counsel, having only returned from Dallas Towers in time to dress for dinner. While that meal was in progress, Vivien had confined herself to a simple narration of her adventures. Lady Villebois seemed amused at the relation, and laughingly bade her curtail her rambles for the future, remarking that she should have been frightened to death by her long absence had not Mr. Le Marchant considerately sent a messenger to apprise her of her erratic young friend's whereabouts.

On the plea of fatigue, Vivien had retired early to her own room, but the thoughts which crowded her brain precluded the possibility of sleep for some hours to come; so she extinguished her candle, wrapped herself in her dressing-gown and sat down at the open window. Leaning both arms on the sill, she looked out at the wide stretch of landscape visible from the window, while the cool night wind fanned her throbbing forehead. The full moon sailed high in a sky of blue-black, cloudless serenity; the morning's storm had cleared the air, and the rain had freshened every leaf and blossom of the climbing roses which clustered thick about the window, bringing out their most delicate fragrance. A light breeze whispered stories of its rambles to the fir-trees which grew near. The moonlight shone on the distant windings

of a small river which wound like a silver ribbon across the clear obscure of night-shrouded landscape.

It was a peaceful scene, and its still beauty quieted the agitation of Vivien's mind; the fresh wind stirred her hair and kissed her cheek; then passed on to whisper its stories to other trees, and to bear messages of comfort to other watchers. As she looked out at the quiet night, the troubled thoughts, the perplexities, the vague anxiety about the future which had oppressed her all the evening, gave place to a calm acquiescence in what seemed at present inevitable: constant intercourse on a footing of seeming friendship with the man of all others whom instinct told her was her enemy in spite of all his professions of good-will. The demonstrative affection Sybil had displayed toward her was the one bright spot in the prospect. She smiled as she recalled the girl's clinging caress at parting, and the words which had accompanied it.

"What a tender-hearted, loving, and lovable creature she is," mused Vivien. "No wonder he loves her."

A little wistful sigh escaped her; the wind caught it, and carried it away to mingle with other sighs—some happy, some anguish-born, some breathed forth from a heart full to overflowing of joy, some wrung out by bitter, hopeless despair. Why Vivien sighed it would be difficult to say; she did not know herself, she was only conscious of a vague yearning after something unknown, something as dim and undefined as the shadowy scene on which her eyes rested.

Sybil's confidence had surprised and at the same time pained her; she felt that Ormerod's reticence on the subject of his engagement was hardly consistent with that friendship for herself which he had claimed so earnestly on the day of their meeting in Lambeth. His visits to Rollestone House since then, though few in number, had been those of a friend rather than of a mere acquaintance. He had talked with her about many things: of his own ambitious aspirations, of his future prospects, of his opinions on many subjects of interest to them both. His knowledge of her visits to the scene of her early struggles had been a sort of bond of union between them. Or-

merod had asked her advice about many things concerning the welfare of the poorer classes—a subject in which his interest had intensified since his adventure among the juvenile roughs of Lambeth. He had listened attentively, even eagerly, to her beneficent if somewhat visionary plans for ameliorating the lot of the toiling, suffering millions for whom she felt so warm and generous a sympathy. Vivien began to hope that the friendship between them would result in some practical good. Ormerod's clear, sensible mind seemed exactly calculated to reduce her vague dreams to some definite shape.

She had never contemplated any other relation than that of friendship between them, yet she was conscious of a feeling of disappointment when she heard of his engagement to Sybil Le Marchant. She could not think of any motive for his reticence, and, though she had no claim to his confidence, she felt that he had been wanting in that perfect candor which is the very soul of true friendship. Then, too, Sybil's estimate of her betrothed had struck her as a curiously unappreciative one. She had expatiated on his good looks, on his distinguished bearing, on his charm of voice and manner, but of his undoubted mental powers she had said not a word.

It had a jarring effect on Vivien to hear the man whom she had already exalted to the rank of a possible social regenerator spoken of in terms which might fitly have described nine out of ten men in any average gathering in any average London drawing-room.

"Poor little girl, I am very unjust to her," soliloquized Vivien, smiling to herself, as she recalled Sybil's pretty, roguish face, her soft, shy eyes, her graceful, kitten-like movements. "She loves him, I think. I hope he will make her happy; she is too tender a flower to stand any of life's storms—she needs love and happiness just as flowers need sun and air. The cold, nipping wind of early sorrow or adversity would blight all the sweetness of the blossom before it could unfold in full beauty. I feel toward her much as I might had she been my sister —a protecting, half-maternal love, for she is little more than a child, in spite of her eighteen years. How prettily

she boasted that she was but a year my junior, when she asked my age in that frank, innocent way of hers! I wonder if she has ever heard my mother's story. I wonder if she knows anything of that dark blot in her father's life. I wonder—but no; how should she? Any reports that may have been circulated about her father's conduct toward my mother would not be likely to reach her ears. The absent are soon forgotten; no doubt my mother's name is as little remembered at Dalthorpe as last year's leaves."

There was no bitterness in Vivien's heart as she thought these thoughts, only a tinge of that quiet sadness which becomes a mental habit when sorrows come too early. Her character had been molded by circumstances, and her naturally fervid temperament had insensibly acquired, save in moments of enthusiasm or of intense emotion, a grave thoughtfulness unusual in a girl of her age.

During the past few months the warm influences of Lady Villebois' motherly affection had dispelled much of the melancholy which too often enveloped her, hiding her brighter and better nature, as mist does an autumn landscape; but the events of that day had awakened old memories of bitterness and gloom, and her heart ached with the old, yearning pain as she thought of her mother and her mother's wrongs. Tears sprang to her eyes as she turned the leaves of the little Tennyson she had begged from the usurper. Here and there in the margin were penciled notes in her mother's handwriting. As she read them with the reverence with which any one, not naturally deficient in that quality, peruses even commonplace words written by a hand now forever stilled by Death, her mother's voice seemed audible in the sighing of the wind as it swept round the house. A vision rose before her mind's eye of that mother—whom she remembered only as pale, wan, hollow-eyed, prematurely worn and aged by sorrow—in all the freshness and beauty of early girlhood, bright with love and hope as she must have been when those half-effaced, penciled words were written. She pictured the dusty, neglected studio, where she had that morning stood face to face with her moth-

er's evil genius, made bright with a girlish presence. She liked to think that the pictures she had looked on, the books she had touched, had once had their place in her mother's daily life.

Dallas Towers, the noble park, the village, the quiet country lanes which environed it were already dear to Vivien, for they had been the scenes among which her mother's happy girlhood had been spent. She felt a sad, dream-like pleasure in the prospect of familiarizing herself with surroundings that must have been so dear to both her parents. Perhaps, among the numerous pictures which covered the walls of that long gallery through which Sybil had led her, there were some painted by her father.

Her father! Vivien sighed deeply as the thought crossed her mind. She could not forget that Bernard Le Marchant's cruelty had indirectly been the means of driving her unhappy father to his doom. It was a thought full of intense bitterness. She felt that all the wrongs her mother had suffered, all the sadness and struggle of her early youth, and the loss of her inheritance were as naught in comparison with this: — that, but for Le Marchant's hard-heartedness, her father would not have left the world with the sin of self-murder on his soul.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. LE MARCHANT'S GRIEVANCE.

MORNING brought calmer thoughts, and when Vivien had related the occurrences of the previous day to Lady Villebois, and listened dutifully to the excellent advice she offered, she felt altogether in a serener frame of mind. Lady Villebois counseled her to maintain an attitude of armed neutrality toward the enemy; that is, to be friendly with the master of Dallas Towers, since it would be difficult under present circumstances to be otherwise, but to be sedulously on her guard against any attempt to

induce her to sign any formal renunciation of her right to her grandfather's estate.

"I cannot understand," said her ladyship, with that quick-witted perception of the weak point in an argument which was one of her many mental gifts, "why, if his claim to the Dallas estates is quite flawless, he should have made that Machiavelian proposal about an annuity. The idea that you might contest your grandfather's will on the score of undue influence is so unlikely, that I should think a man of his stamp would not care to part with his money on such a very remote contingency as that."

"I should certainly never dream of contesting my grandfather's will. I told Mr. Le Marchant so; but he scarcely seemed to believe me."

"I suppose he could not understand such disinterestedness. But I am still at a loss to account for his somewhat ostentatious display of friendliness. A man of that sort seldom acts without a motive. I shall be better able to judge when I have seen him with you."

So the subject dropped, and she began to talk of that other disclosure which had resulted from Vivien's visit to Dallas Towers—Felix Ormerod's engagement to Sybil.

Lady Villebois was at no pains to hide the vexation and disapproval she felt. That charming little air-castle of hers was shattered at a blow, and she sat, Marius-like, among the ruins. Vivien laughed so merrily at her look of blank disappointment, that she congratulated herself the girl was perfectly heart-whole, so far as Ormerod was concerned, and that no mischief had been done as yet by her match-making. Still, she felt aggrieved that he should have withheld his confidence from her, and she said as much to Vivien.

"The engagement may not yet be given out to the world," the girl said, deprecatingly. "Sybil told me in confidence—perhaps I ought not to have repeated it even to you."

"In confidence! Nonsense, my dear!" retorted her ladyship, with unusual asperity. "Why, you were little better than a stranger to her!"

"Yes. But, for all that, I believe she looks on me quite

as an old friend. It is curious that she should have made up her mind to like me even before we met."

"It *is* curious, especially as she knows nothing of the strange tie between you. I suppose the days of hereditary hatreds are over, or—"

"Oh! Lady Villebois, don't finish that sentence," said Vivien, quickly. "Poor child, she is not answerable for her father's sins."

"The sins of the fathers are visited on the children, you know, Vivien."

"Oh, that is a cruel, hard Mosaic law. I cannot recognize it!" cried the other, warmly. "I do not feel one spark of resentment against Sybil."

"And yet she will inherit, I suppose, all that should have been yours?"

"That is not her fault."

"Dear child, you are a sermon to me, hardened worldling that I am," said Lady Villebois, laying her hand tenderly on Vivien's. "I fear, in your place, I should not be so just or so generous. I won't say another word on the subject, and I will do all I can to make myself agreeable to these people when they think proper to call on me, though it will go sorely against the grain."

Mrs. Le Marchant called that afternoon with Sybil, whose pretty face and winning *naïveté* of manner went far to neutralize the disagreeable impression made on Lady Villebois by Selina's languid inanity.

"That woman has something feline in her nature," she remarked to Vivien, when the two ladies had gone. "I always dislike people with light eyelashes and cold gray eyes."

"Mrs. Le Marchant is certainly not a pleasant person," assented Vivien. "Poor Sybil! I don't wonder she yearns for some one to love her and sympathize with her; her mother does not give her a very warm affection."

"Warm affection from that cold-eyed woman! As well expect grapes from thorns, figs from thistles, or any other impossible thing."

"Then do you wonder that I feel sorry for Sybil? I

don't think she gets much affection from either of her parents.'

"My dear Vivien, I see that you are bent on exalting that pretty but very commonplace young woman into a heroine. I have nothing to say against her elevation to that dignity, but don't expect me to sing her praises. She is shallow, frivolous, and, I think, vain."

"Oh, Lady Villebois, I never knew you unjust before!"

"At any rate, we won't quarrel on the subject, my dear; you keep your opinion, and I will keep mine. But I must say I think Felix Ormerod has done the most foolish thing a man can well do. He hung a millstone round his neck on the day he asked that pretty doll to be his wife, and some day he will find it out. She will drag him down to her level, trample on his best and loftiest feelings, and utterly crush any ambitious aspirations he may cherish. In her way, she is charming enough now—I am ready to acknowledge that; but picture her fifteen years hence! She will be just a narrow-minded, uninteresting nonentity incapable of one intelligent idea on any subject whatever. But I won't vex you by saying more," she said, checking herself as she saw the pained look on Vivien's face. "I can see that you already think me a very hard-hearted old woman because I don't surrender myself to the charm of Miss Le Marchant's pretty face. And now let us talk of something else."

In a few days Lady Villebois and Vivien drove over to Dallas Towers to return Mrs. Le Marchant's call. They found that lady sitting alone, and evidently nursing a grievance; for her thin lips drooped peevishly at the corners, her narrow forehead was puckered into a frown, and her gray eyes had in them a subdued sparkle of repressed anger. The cause of her vexation was soon revealed. In spite of the very slight acquaintanceship between the visitors and herself, Selina did not attempt to hide the fretful wrath smoldering within her. Vivien unwittingly gave her the wished-for opportunity of unbosoming herself by asking after Sybil.

"My daughter is, I believe, out somewhere in the park

with Mr. Ormerod, who arrived here yesterday," she said, acidly.

Both Lady Villebois and Vivien looked surprised.

"You have not heard, perhaps, of my daughter's engagement to Mr. Ormerod?" Selina went on, misunderstanding the reason of their surprise.

"Oh, yes!" said the elder lady, quickly. "Pray accept my congratulations."

"Thank you," murmured Selina, coldly. "I hope this marriage will be for my daughter's happiness," she resumed, in a hope-for-the-best-but-fear-the-worst tone which implied a doubt whether conjugal happiness would be Sybil's portion; "but for my part I cannot understand the necessity for this indecent haste."

"I don't understand," said Lady Villebois, raising her eyebrows; "is the marriage to come off soon?"

"Yes: so at least I was informed this morning. Dear Lady Villebois," went on Selina, with the look and air of a martyr, "I am sure you will sympathize with my feelings in this matter. Sybil is my only child, and I naturally looked forward to introducing her into society next season. My life here is so monotonous—what I suffer from sheer *ennui* you would not believe—and the society obtainable in Grasshire is hardly as brilliant as that to which I was accustomed before my marriage."

Lady Villebois could scarcely repress a smile. She happened to know that the society in which the speaker's father (the notoriously impecunious and unscrupulous Lord Hardingham) lived was certainly not "monotonous," but its brilliance was rather the fictitious sparkle of a Palais Royal "diamond" than the luster of the genuine Golcondian gem.

"You may imagine, therefore," continued Mrs. Le Marchant, in serene unconsciousness of the other's mental comment, "that I anticipated with no little pleasure spending next season in town. I had even," she added, plaintively, "settled that we should take a house in one of the streets leading out of Park Lane; for I abhor Belgravia and Tyburnia and Kensingtonia, they are too *parvenus* for my taste. I had made up my mind that Sybil's

first season should be a brilliant one, though as an 'engaged' *débutante* she would have lost the principal incentive to achieving a real success. Still I hoped her first season would lay the foundation to the social position I trust she will enjoy as a married woman. You see, dear Lady Villebois, I speak frankly to you. I am ambitious for my child—surely it is a pardonable weakness in a mother. But Mr. Ormerod and my husband," she resumed, with a new access of peevish vexation, "have thought proper to upset all my plans. Imagine, I had even arranged with Madame Maude—whose taste is irreproachable, that every one must admit—for a series of dresses—"

"For your daughter?" put in Lady Villebois, with a dim idea of offering consolation; "will they not come in for her trousseau?"

"No," said Mrs. Le Marchant, with some asperity, "for myself. A *débutante's* gowns can hardly be too simple."

"Oh, yes, of course," assented the other, brushing her lips with her handkerchief to hide the smile on them. "But when is the wedding to be?"

"In October: positively in less than two months! I feel that I cannot do myself justice if I am allowed only two months to provide my daughter's trousseau. Do you wonder that I am upset and annoyed by this extraordinary and, I must repeat, indecent haste?"

"No doubt Mr. Ormerod is anxious to secure his bride," said Lady Villebois, with a touch of irony too fine to penetrate the armor of Mrs. Le Marchant's obtuse self-complacency.

"Ah, yes, of course," she said, crossly. "Men are so dreadfully inconsiderate. My husband, for instance, seems delighted at the whole affair."

Lady Villebois glanced meaningly at Vivien, who sat calm, pale, and quiet—a silent but attentive listener to the conversation. The glance said, "Has he any reason for hastening this marriage?" The girl understood it, but her eyes were instantly averted, so that Lady Villebois could read in them no answer to her mute question.

"Miss Le Marchant being an heiress," she said, aloud,

turning again to Selina, "no doubt her father is anxious to see her suitably and speedily married. Mr. Ormerod is quite an unexceptional *parti*. He is extremely clever, and one of the most rising young men of the day."

"So I have heard. But, dear Lady Villebois, pray don't think for a moment that I object to Mr. Ormerod as a husband for my daughter. Only I think this unnecessary haste is altogether most vexatious and inconvenient."

The words had hardly left the speaker's lips when the door opened, and Sybil and Ormerod entered. She was flushed, eager, and excited; he, pale and composed, but with the look of a man who has lately passed through an ordeal of some sort.

When the usual greetings had been exchanged, Vivien ventured to steal a look at his face. His eyes had dark circles round them; his lips were compressed. There was an unmistakable expression of trouble, doubt, and uneasiness on his face. Sybil, on the contrary, appeared in brilliant spirits. She soon drew somewhat apart from the rest, seated herself by Vivien's side, and began a lively conversation in whispers, while Ormerod talked to the two elder ladies.

"Vivien, I am so happy!" said Sybil, taking her friend's hand, and squeezing it affectionately. "Has mamma told you? I am to be married in October. I wish I could get you upstairs. I do so want to talk it all over with you. Oh! it is so nice to have a friend I *can* talk to. Mamma is so unsympathetic—indeed, she has been quite cross ever since papa told her about it. Papa and Felix settled it all last night in the study."

"I hope you will be very happy, Sybil dear," whispered Vivien, smiling rather sadly, and pressing the soft little hand in hers.

"I am sure I shall."

Again Vivien's eyes sought Ormerod's face; but it was turned from her as he talked, and she could only see it in profile. The change in him was but too visible; his features were sharpened by suffering. Was *he* happy, too? she thought, with a sudden pang of pity at her heart. He did not look so. There was little of the proud, happy

lover in his aspect as he composedly discussed the latest London news, social and political, with Lady Villebois and Mrs. Le Marchant. Save that brief "How do you do, Miss Lowry?" he had addressed no word to her, and, when his hand had touched hers for a moment, he had evaded meeting her eyes.

"We are to be married very quietly here at Dalthorpe," went on Sybil, in the same confidential whisper. "Mamma wanted a grand wedding in London, but papa and Felix sided with me. I would much rather be married in our own pretty church—don't you think it would be ever so much nicer?"

"Yes, much," assented Vivien, absently. She was still thinking and wondering about the cause of that curious change in Ormerod's look and manner.

"You will be my bridesmaid, won't you?" said Sybil, anxiously. "I don't care for any of the girls about here, and I don't want a string of bridesmaids. I only want *you;* you won't refuse me, will you?"

The color flushed suddenly into Vivien's face, and a startled, troubled look came into her eyes. She hesitated.

"Oh, you must, you really must—promise me you will," persisted the other, eagerly. "I shall be so—so *hurt* if you won't."

"Very well, I promise."

She spoke reluctantly, but Sybil, having triumphantly carried her point, did not pause to consider whether the promise was willingly or unwillingly given.

"Thank you, dear," she said, with a grateful glance; "and now I want to know if you will come and spend a week at the Towers."

"I should not like to leave Lady Villebois alone, and—" stammered Vivien, taken aback by this new demand on her friendship.

"Now you are going to overwhelm me with objections," interrupted Sybil, holding up her hand deprecatingly, "so I am going to overrule them in anticipation. I shall ask Lady Villebois as a special and particular favor to spare you to me for just one little week, and I know she won't refuse me."

At this point, and to Vivien's intense relief, Lady Villebois rose to depart, and she was spared any further discussion on the subject. Ormerod escorted them to their carriage, but, save the mere commonplace phrases of every-day social life, no word passed between Vivien and him.

CHAPTER VII.

LADY VILLEBOIS JUMPS TO A CONCLUSION.

In the course of a few days, Vivien received a note from Mrs. Le Marchant, asking her to spend the week at the Towers. The note was handed to her when alone in her room, and she hastened down to the library to answer it there and then. It was so much easier to write a refusal to Sybil's mother than to speak it to Sybil herself. To Vivien's surprise, on entering the library, she found Lady Villebois and Mr. Le Marchant engaged in earnest conversation.

"Vivien, my dear, Mr. Le Marchant will positively take no refusal. He rode over to deliver Mrs. Le Marchant's note in person, and he tells me that the note contains an invitation to Dallas Towers."

"I am sure, if Miss Lowry knew how much pleasure she would give by paying us a visit, she would not refuse," said Le Marchant, shaking hands with Vivien, and bending on her a look of intense but subdued eagerness.

"You really must excuse me," she murmured, averting her eyes. "I could not leave Lady Villebois alone."

"Don't refuse on my account, my dear, if that is your only reason for doing so," put in that lady, quickly.

"I would rather not leave you," replied Vivien, in a low tone. Le Marchant's quick ear caught her answer, and he said, turning to Lady Villebois with marked deference:

"I am sure it would give Mrs. Le Marchant the greatest pleasure to see you at the Towers. Will you let the matter remain undecided for the present? My wife will drive over this afternoon to give her invitation in person."

"Oh, pray don't give her that trouble. I am not so bound by conventionalities. I shall be happy to spend a few days at the Towers. What do you say, Vivien?"

Vivien was placed in an awkward position. The ground had been cut from under her feet, and as Lady Villebois had, in a manner, gone over to the enemy, she felt she had no excuse to offer. Le Marchant, seeing her hesitate, returned to the attack with zest.

"I have a special message to you from my daughter, Miss Lowry," he said, again bending his keen glance on Vivien. "She declares that if you refuse she will consider herself a most cruelly-treated young woman—in short, that your presence at the Towers is really essential to her happiness. I daresay I have not given the message word for word, but that is the substance of it."

Vivien smiled.

"Dear Sybil," she said, softly, "I can't refuse her."

"Then you will come? My embassy is successful," said Le Marchant, eagerly. "Let me see. This is Monday; may we expect you and Miss Lowry on Wednesday?" he added, turning again to Lady Villebois, who had been watching his every look and word with quiet scrutiny.

"Yes," she said, meeting his eye with a calm yet penetrating glance. "On Wednesday Vivien and I will be at the Towers."

Le Marchant rose to take his leave with the air of a man who has carried a difficult affair to a successful issue.

"Won't you stay to luncheon?" said Lady Villebois, equably.

"No, thank you. I made a promise to Sybil that I would bring back Miss Lowry's answer before the luncheon-gong sounded."

"Vivien," said Lady Villebois, when he had departed, "that man has some deep motive for all this display of friendliness. I purposely accepted his very cavalier invitation because I mean to watch him closely during our stay at the Towers. Now, don't reproach me for meditating a breach of the sacred laws of hospitality," she added, quickly, seeing that Vivien was about to interrupt

her; "craft must be met with craft; duplicity with duplicity. There are dozens of wise old saws to justify my conduct, 'all fair in love or war,' among them. Well, unless I'm much mistaken, Mr. Le Marchant means war—a guerilla sort of warfare, perhaps—but I mean to fight your battles, my dear, and the campaign begins on Wednesday," she went on, brightly, "*chi vivrà, vedrà.* How will it end, I wonder? Will it be war to the knife, or peace with honor? Vivien, do you believe in presentiments? I have a strong one—but no, it is no mere presentiment, so I won't give way to superstition. I have jumped to a conclusion without establishing premises. I have violated every rule of logic, but I am sure that my unscientifically-arrived-at conclusion is a true one!"

"What is it?" asked Vivien, smiling, but without eagerness.

"That this civil-spoken, crafty-eyed Mr. Le Marchant has no real right to the position he now fills as master of Dallas Towers."

"No right! But he told me that my grandfather left him all the estates."

"We have only Mr. Le Marchant's word for that, remember."

"But," persisted Vivien, "how could he have obtained possession of the Towers, if he had not been able to prove that my grandfather's property was rightfully his?"

"Was there any one to dispute the matter?" retorted her ladyship, with some heat.

"No, but—"

"But me no buts, my dear child. I am sure I am on the right tack, though I have not the smallest evidence to prove my case. Women, though they generally arrive at conclusions by unorthodox means, are yet often right in the main. In time, I feel confident I shall prove my case. Meanwhile I await the course of events, relying as ever on my theory that Time brings about its revenges."

Vivien was silent. An entirely new train of thought had been suggested to her. Lady Villebois' words had reawakened the feelings of dislike and distrust she so long felt for Le Marchant—feelings which had been lulled

into passivity by his carefully assumed cordiality. It was not her nature to think the worst of any human being, and, of late, she had begun to look on Le Marchant as one who had sinned, indeed, but who having repented had, so far as in him lay, striven to atone for his sins. She had not forgotten her mother's sufferings or her father's miserable fate. So long as sense and memory remained, she must remember their wrongs and who had inflicted them; but, she argued, if Le Marchant had repented his misdeeds, was she justified in cherishing resentment against the repentant sinner?

"Well?" said Lady Villebois, with an inquiring look at Vivien's face, "what do you think about it? You look troubled and bewildered by this new idea of mine."

"I am. I can't understand why you should think Mr. Le Marchant guilty of so great a crime."

"A crime—well, yes, I suppose the means he must have taken to secure the estates, if my surmise is correct, would come under the head of criminal offenses," mused Lady Villebois, passing her thin white hand across her forehead. "Vivien," she added, with a sudden brightening of the eye that betokened some new turn of thought, "one thing I will do. I will write or telegraph to my solicitors and request them to send some one to Doctors' Commons."

"Why to Doctors' Commons?"

"To take an extract from your grandfather's will. I am particularly curious to know when that will was made."

Again Vivien was silent. She was accustomed to place implicit faith in her friend's superior wisdom and knowledge of the world; she never for a moment doubted her intention of doing what was right and just in this matter, but she hesitated to join in what seemed to her a plot against Le Marchant. Though he was her mother's enemy, and in a measure hers, he was yet Sybil's father. Ruin to Le Marchant would mean also ruin to the bright-faced girl who had treated her as a sister and confided in her as a friend.

"My dear, you need not look so grave," said Lady Villebois, laying her hand kindly on Vivien's shoulder.

"I am not asking you to do anything mean or underhand. Surely it is a very natural thing that you should have a copy of your grandfather's will. I respect your scruples, but, at the same time, I must say I think them quixotic. Remember, if what I have surmised proves correct, this man has wickedly and deliberately robbed you of your inheritance—"

"I will be guided entirely by you," was the low reply. "I dare not rely on my own judgment in this matter."

"Very well, then. I take on myself the responsibility of getting a copy of the will. If my surmise prove incorrect, I shall be the first to hold out the right hand of fellowship to Mr. Le Marchant; but, until he stands cleared of what I strongly suspect him to be guilty, I consider myself at liberty to use my eyes and ears intelligently during my stay at Dallas Towers."

"Does it not seem ungenerous to accept Mr. Le Marchant's hospitality for that purpose?"

"I think not. At any rate, I have resolved to satisfy myself on this point: is Bernard Le Marchant the rightful owner of your grandfather's estates, or is he not? When I have decided this question, I will give up my *rôle* of amateur private detective, and not till then. And now," she said, rising, and seating herself at her escritoire, "I am going to write to my solicitors. A letter will be more satisfactory than a telegram, and I daresay I shall get the copy of the will by Wednesday. If not, I shall leave directions for it to be forwarded to Dallas Towers."

During the rest of that day, Le Marchant's name was not mentioned again between them. Vivien awaited the result of the inquiries set on foot by Lady Villebois with conflicting feelings. She was anxious, restless, unhappy, vaguely expectant of some impending event that would change the whole current of her future life.

In spite of all her efforts to reason herself out of what she thought a foolish misgiving, she dreaded the coming visit to Dallas Towers. Not only did she feel an inexplicable, shrinking reluctance to meet Le Marchant, but, though she bravely tried to battle down the feeling as a

disloyalty to the gentle girl who had manifested a sisterly love toward herself, the prospect of meeting Ormerod in his new character of Sybil's accepted lover filled her with a sense of undefined pain. Until the day when her own eyes convinced her to the contrary, she honestly believed that the engagement had brought as much happiness to Ormerod as to Sybil. But the look of unmistakable suffering she had seen on his face that afternoon convinced her that such was not the case.

"And yet," she argued to herself, "he must love her, or why did he ask her to be his wife?"

Not for a moment did she suppose that Sybil's heiressship had had anything to do with the matter. Had any one suggested such an idea to her, she would have repelled the base insinuation as a calumny. Ormerod seemed to her incapable of so meanly mercenary a motive. She felt sure that he would ask no woman to be his wife unless he loved her; therefore, he must love Sybil. There must be some other cause for his evident unhappiness. Perhaps he would confide it to her; perhaps she might be able to help him. He had called her his friend once; surely she might do him a friend's service, if the power to do it were hers.

She reproached herself for entertaining even for a moment the thought that his engagement to Sybil was not calculated to bring him happiness. Sybil was charmingly pretty, sweet-tempered, lovable—what more could a man wish in a wife? Of course he loved her; she had been unkind, ungenerous, and foolish ever to doubt it.

And so Vivien continued to blind herself to the true state of the case, refusing to listen to the promptings of her own heart, crushing down all the bright dreams and fancies she had, woman-like, taken pleasure in weaving about her own future, and, deliberately renouncing all thought of happiness for herself, resolved to live on from day to day neither looking back nor forward, but holding straight on in the thorny path of right without reck of wounded feet or weary heart.

Lady Villebois, with her usual acuteness, had formed a tolerably correct idea of the true solution of an enigma

that had puzzled her considerably at first—viz., why a man of Ormerod's caliber had, as she expressed it, tied a millstone, in the shape of pretty Sybil Le Marchant, about his neck at the very outset of his career. It was not a flattering comparison, perhaps, to liken that pretty creature to a senseless block of stone, but Lady Villebois never troubled herself about that. Sybil's prettiness, her *naïveté*, her winning childishness of manner, had no charm for her; she saw only the shallowness of her character, the lack of mental and moral stamina apparent in her. In a word, Lady Villebois judged Sybil justly, while Vivien judged her generously. Just as a rasping east wind will be termed "bracing" or "biting," or a summer day "brilliant" or "sweltering," according to the taste or the idiosyncrasy of the individual who experiences those extremes of climate.

Perhaps Lady Villebois' severity was in part the result of the very real vexation she felt when she heard of Ormerod's engagement. That visionary air-castle she had taken such pleasure in rearing had melted into its native elements, leaving no more trace behind it than did Aladdin's palace. Though she had no one to blame but herself for the instability of the foundations on which she had reared this aerial edifice, she could not bring herself to look on Sybil otherwise than as an interloper and a marplot, and the feeling that in doing so she was both unjust and unkind had the effect of still further heightening her vexation.

The new idea she had originated about Le Marchant's unproved right to the Dallas estates afforded her a vicarious method of venting her dissatisfaction with things in general. Her active brain, once set working, found plenty of material for the construction of another Spanish castle provided with more practical, if not more reliable, foundations than that which had so recently faded away before her "like the baseless fabric of a vision."

BOOK THE FOURTH.

QUICKSANDS.

O, thou child of many prayers!
Life hath quicksands—Life hath snares!
—LONGFELLOW.

CHAPTER I.

SYBIL'S KNIGHT OF THE KNAPSACK.

WEDNESDAY morning dawned bright and fair. Rain had fallen ceaselessly all the preceding day, and the air had the purity and freshness of May rather than the sultry oppression of August. Vivien, as was her wont, was out and about before the breakfast-gong sounded. Like most impressionable people, she was much influenced by weather. The depression and languor she had experienced the day before, while the rain fell and the clouds hung low, passed away as she met the cool morning breeze and looked up at the brilliant sky. Her spirits rose; the vague dread with which she had hitherto contemplated her visit to Dallas Towers gave place to a feeling of pleasurable anticipation—for, at nineteen, the silver cloud-lining does not long remain hidden. Vivien's face was as bright as the morning when she met Lady Villebois at the breakfast-table. That lady, however, looked unusually grave; she held an open letter in her hand, which she read over several times with a puzzled air.

"Vivien," she said at last, "I have heard from my solicitors."

A shadow fell on Vivien's face.

"Yes?" she said, gravely.

This question of her mother's lost inheritance jarred on her present mood. She wanted to forget the past if she could; but it was not to be.

"They have given me the very information I wanted,"

pursued Lady Villebois, with subdued eagerness; "your grandfather's will—the will under which Bernard Le Marchant succeeded to the Dallas estates—was made as far back as December, eighteen hundred and fifty-eight—a few months after your mother's marriage."

"But that proves rather than disproves Mr. Le Marchant's right, does it not?" remarked Vivien; "if my grandfather bequeathed the property to him, there is an end of the matter, surely."

"Not at all. My dear child, you are really too simple. Does it not strike you that it is more than within the range of possibility that your grandfather, moved by a feeling of remorse—of justice rather—made a *second* will?" she added, lowering her voice.

Vivien looked at the speaker in astonishment.

"A second will!"

"Yes; why not?"

"But—"

"Ah, now for a hundred and fifty arguments against my theory!" laughed Lady Villebois. "My dear Vivien, I see you are obstinately bent on putting Mr. Le Marchant in the right."

"Not at all. I am anxious only to do what is right."

"Very well, then. I will put the matter in another light. Suppose, just for the sake of argument, that your grandfather *did* make a second will, and *did* bequeath his fortune to your mother, is it right for you to allow his wishes to be deliberately set aside by one who has played the traitor once—and, if once, why not again and again?"

Vivien was silent, but there were signs of emotion written on her face that her friend did not misread.

"I know," pursued Lady Villebois, "that you have no selfish craving for wealth; but ask yourself if wealth has not grave duties which you ought not to shirk. If Mr. Dallas bequeathed to your mother what after all was rightfully hers, the Dallas estates are now yours; and you should not shrink from the responsibilities which such large possessions naturally bring. Then think how you could spend that wealth, think of the misery you could alleviate! You have known poverty, you have

seen how the poor live, can you not picture the change you might make in hundreds of miserable lives, merely by a wise exercise of the power wealth gives?"

There was a momentary flash in Vivien's eyes, a heightened color in her cheeks. She raised her head and looked at her friend with a kindling glance.

"Ah!" she said, with a long-drawn inspiration. Lady Villebois had touched the right chord. The abstract idea of wealth had failed to charm her, but the power to help the unhappy was a power she had often yearned to possess, and now if what Lady Villebois imagined were true, if Dallas Towers and its broad acres belonged of right to her and not to Bernard Le Marchant, that power was hers. Her heart leaped within her as she thought of the joy it might be her lot to give those for whom life was but a long struggle to keep the wolf from the door.

Lady Villebois smiled as she noted the sudden change her words had wrought.

"Well, my dear, does wealth look more tempting now? Will you let me make further inquiries about this will?"

"Act as you think best. I leave the matter in your hands," said Vivien, slowly, the color fading from her cheeks and the light from her eyes.

"Then," said Lady Villebois, with a little air of triumph, "when breakfast is over I shall write again to my solicitors, and instruct them to proceed as I shall direct."

"What is the first step to be?" asked the girl, in a low voice.

"To find out all the particulars of the last years of your grandfather's life."

"It will be a difficult thing to do at this distance of time."

"Distance of time—nonsense! Your grandfather died four or five years ago. Why, it is a mere nothing; a clever detective would ferret out events of a far remoter date. Just let me manage matters in my own way, and I know I shall succeed. This affair, remember, is *my* affair now—since you have given it into my hands. Trust me all in all, or not at all. I hate half confidences and half measures."

"I trust you implicitly," said Vivien, smiling.

"Very well; then there is no need for further discussion. I shall now retire to the library to write my letter, and you, my dear, being free from such sordid cares, may betake yourself to the garden until the carriage comes round. Remember we start at eleven for Dallas Towers."

An hour or two later the two ladies were bowling rapidly along the pleasant country lanes toward Dalthorpe. Lady Villebois was in brilliant spirits, talking incessantly, as was her wont, but she did not once allude to Vivien's possible heiress-ship. The latter was rather silent and absent, only responding by brief monosyllables to her friend's bright sallies.

As they passed the gates of Dallas Towers and drove up the broad avenue, the melancholy that had oppressed Vivien of late returned, and she looked about her with sad, wistful eyes. She was nearing the home of her mother's girlish days. The grand old trees, the velvet turf, the noble façade of the Towers seemed to be the half-remembered scene of a dream-drama, rather than palpable realities. The whisper of the breeze as it swept through the leaves seemed full of mystery; a curious fancy flashed through her mind that her mother's spirit was hovering about, that the soft air which fanned her cheek was freighted with a spirit-message; that words inaudible to other ears were borne to her from the dim world beyond the grave. With an effort she roused herself, dispersing the dream-like mists, that were closing round her, by a vigorous exercise of her reason. Vivien rarely gave way to morbid, brooding thoughts, though, perhaps owing to the strange, lonely life she had lived in her childhood and early youth, they occasionally visited her.

"Here we are!" said Lady Villebois, in her briskest tones as the carriage swept up to the entrance. "My dear Vivien, I don't think you have spoken a dozen words since we left Mordaunt's Rest. What have you been dreaming about?"

Vivien made no reply; her heart was full: the dream-

like feeling had gone, but the sadness remained, and she felt grateful to Sybil (who was standing at the entrance in her garden-hat, looking the embodiment of youth and happiness) for the enthusiastic welcome which effectually covered any embarrassment she might feel herself.

"How good of you to come, dear Lady Villebois," said Sybil, in her prettiest manner. "Mamma has one of her bad headaches, and is lying down on the sofa in her boudoir, so has deputed me to receive you."

Then she kissed both ladies with effusion, and insisted on showing them to their rooms herself, hovering about them like some bright humming-bird as she did so.

"Your room is next to mine; I arranged that," she whispered to Vivien. "May I come in while you take off your bonnet?" she added, naively, "I have so much to tell you and I am so impatient, I can't wait."

Vivien smiled her assent, and Sybil ensconced herself in one of the low easy-chairs, with an air of quiet satisfaction.

"There," she said, with a little sigh of relief fluttering from between her rosy lips, "at last I have carried my point. You are here—actually here at Dallas Towers for a whole week certain, and for as much longer as we can persuade you to stay. How nice it is to get your own way, don't you think so?"

"That depends."

"Oh, I like it always. Do you think Felix will let me do just as I like when—when we are married? He does now."

"Impossible to say," replied Vivien, turning to the glass to smooth her hair. "I am sure he will always be kind."

"Yes, of course; but I have had my own way so little all my life, and I should like to do just as I please when I am married."

"I don't want to preach to you, Sybil, but is there not something in the marriage service about 'loving, honoring, and *obeying*' your husband?" said Vivien, with a grave smile. It was impossible to treat Sybil otherwise than as a child. She could not argue with her, but it

seemed unspeakably sad to know that the woman who was to make the happiness or misery of Ormerod's life had no higher thought of marriage than this.

"I daresay there is," replied Sybil, lightly. "I don't think I ever read the marriage service through; they say it is unlucky. But," she resumed, settling her features into an expression of gravity, "I haven't told you the romantic adventure I had the other day. You know my horse Etoile Filante? On Monday, when Felix had run up to town for the day, I took it into my head that a canter over the Crays-nest Common would while away the time, so I ordered Etoile to be saddled, and, with my groom Jenkins behind me, off I went. Well, Etoile was rather wild, for she doesn't get half enough to do in summer. When I got to the common, I had my canter, but Etoile, having, I suppose, enjoyed it as much as I, felt no inclination to go home; at any rate, she took the bit between her teeth, and was off again at racing speed, and I was as powerless as a child to stop her."

"But what was Jenkins doing all this time? You are really a very imprudent little girl, Sybil."

"Not at all," said Sybil, pouting. "I wanted a canter, and I got one. Only it was rather furious toward the end. But I don't regret the affair one bit, because it was through Etoile's unmanageableness that I had my romantic adventure—just like a heroine in a novel. There was a hero in the business, too," she went on, nodding her head mysteriously; "not that he looked much like one, though, only he behaved heroically. He caught hold of Etoile's bridle just as she was dashing at a high gate, where I feel sure I should have fallen ignominiously, and probably have broken my back, or, at least, cut my face, and disfigured myself for life, which would have been almost as bad."

"Oh! Sybil, don't speak so lightly of it. You might have been killed!" exclaimed Vivien, turning pale.

"Of course I might, dear; that is just the exciting part of it. But don't you want to hear about my hero? Poor old Jenkins was plodding along hopelessly in the rear. I believe he tried his best to stop Etoile, though his efforts

to do so only made matters worse, because she fancied she was racing his horse, and was determined not to be beaten. So, you see, Jenkins was no use at all, and had it not been for my knight of the knapsack—well, I won't say what might have happened, because I can see it makes you shiver."

"But who was this knight of the knapsack, as you call him, and how did he come to your aid?"

"It all happened in the orthodox fashion, just as I have read it in dozens of novels. My horse reared up, the hero caught the bridle, hung on it with all his might, and in a shorter time than it takes me to tell it Etoile was conquered, and I was thanking 'my preserver' with becoming gratitude."

"And did you find out who he was?"

"My 'preserver'?—yes, and no. I did not find out his name then, for he did not volunteer the information, and I did not like to ask it; but he told me that he was on a walking tour, and was staying for a day or two at the 'George' inn at Dalthorpe. He seemed quite interested when I told him I lived near there, but, as he had not thought proper to tell me his name, I did not feel disposed to disclose mine; so we parted with mutual civilities, never dreaming that we were to meet again shortly, under very different circumstances."

"Then you saw this gentleman again?"

"Oh! yes, that very evening. Felix returned from town by the afternoon instead of the later train, so, as the evening was lovely, we went for a stroll before dinner, while mamma was dozing on the sofa. Just outside the park gates who should we meet but the hero of my morning's adventure! I forgot to say that of course I had confided the whole affair to Felix, who read me a lecture on my recklessness, as he was pleased to call it—though for my part I can't see that I was to blame for Etoile's friskiness."

"Well," said Vivien, hurriedly—she was anxious to turn the conversation away from Ormerod—"what happened then? I suppose you felt obliged to speak."

"To my hero? Oh, indeed, I had no occasion to do so;

for, to my utter astonishment, he came straight up to us, raised his hat to me, and grasped Felix cordially by the hand. Then followed introductions, explanations, and so on. It seems that he and Felix are old friends, and schoolfellows, too, I believe; at any rate, they seemed uncommonly glad to see each other, though I fancied he —my knight of the knapsack, I mean—looked a little disappointed when he heard my name. Felix thanked him warmly for coming to my rescue that morning, and insisted on his returning with us to the house to be thanked again by papa and mamma. And so, to cut my story short, this unromantic-looking hero was brought in triumph to the Towers. Of course papa asked him to dinner, and what is more, when he heard that he was staying at the 'George,' begged him to take up his quarters here. And so I shall have the pleasure of introducing this knight of the knapsack to you at luncheon."

"But all this time you have not told me his name," said Vivien, smiling.

"Oh, I forgot. His name is Atherstone—Ralph Atherstone, and Felix says he is one of the cleverest men he knows. I am sure you and he will get on splendidly together, because you are very clever, too, and you will be able to talk to him about things which I am too stupid to understand. There, that is the first luncheon-gong sounding. I must run and smooth my hair, unless I am prepared to meet one of mamma's black looks."

CHAPTER II.

"ALL OCCASIONS DO INFORM AGAINST ME!"

WHEN the two girls descended to the drawing-room, they found Mrs. Le Marchant partially recovered from her headache, and talking with much graciousness to Lady Villebois.

"How do you do, Miss Lowry? I am very glad to see you," she said, holding out her hand with a careful as-

sumption of cordiality. It did not, however, for a moment deceive Vivien, who was perfectly aware of the antipathy Sybil's mother had for her.

Fortunately, however, she was spared the necessity for further conversation with her hostess by the entrance of Mr. Le Marchant and his two guests. Atherstone was duly presented to the new arrivals, and as Lady Villebois began a lively discussion with Le Marchant, and Ormerod and Sybil were standing somewhat apart from the rest, Atherstone naturally addressed himself to Vivien, who, on her side, felt some amount of interest in one whose introduction to Dallas Towers and its inmates had been brought about under such unusual conditions.

As was generally the case with strangers, Vivien's face and figure impressed Atherstone considerably; not only because of their beauty—though that naturally won his admiration. The charm which attracted him was something higher than the fleeting charm of mere physical loveliness. Her stately height, and the grand outlines of her form, lent a dignity and meaning to her every movement, while the ever-varying expression of her mobile features and beautiful dark-gray eyes completely rebutted the charge of cold severity so often brought against faces of purely classic mold. Seen in repose, Vivien was a handsome, queenly woman; when she spoke and smiled, and when her eyes lighted up with enthusiasm, she was beautiful, winning, enchanting—no mere words can adequately describe the charm of her presence.

Atherstone, though not—as he would truthfully have affirmed—a "lady's man," felt unusual interest in talking to this handsome Miss Lowry. To begin with, she was that *rara avis*, a good listener—that is, an intelligent and sympathetic listener. It was really a pleasure to talk to her, and he was stimulated to do his conversational best. He made the few minutes before luncheon pass so agreeably for Vivien that she was by no means sorry to see him take the chair next her own, when they went into the dining-room.

America was a country which had always interested her, and her neighbor appeared to be as familiar with

the social amenities of New York and Boston as he was with the wild life of Texan cattle-ranchers, and the latest development of modern civilization in San Francisco. With true feminine tact, Vivien drew him on to tell her a great deal about his American experiences. A man must be dull, indeed, not to feel the mental stimulus of an appreciative auditor, especially when that auditor is a beautiful woman. Atherstone—who was certainly not dull—really surpassed himself, and more than once the low hum of general conversation died away to silence as he narrated some thrilling adventure in the Rockies; some hair-breadth escape from the deadly hug of a grizzly, or battle for life in the blinding whirl of a mountain snow-storm.

Sybil—who, like most of her sex, from Desdemona downward, had a great love of the marvelous—listened to these stories with parted lips, and eyes dilated by wonder and awe. She felt ashamed of the flippant carelessness with which she had spoken of Atherstone to Vivien. It was one thing to have a service rendered her by a man whose exterior was neither strikingly handsome nor distinguished, and another to know that the hero of all these thrilling adventures had saved her from possible death.

She was not a keen observer, and, consequently, she had never troubled herself to find out the real nature of the man. She had put him down as a rather plain and perfectly uninteresting individual—clever, of course, because Felix had said so, and Felix was always right in such matters. But his cleverness was not of a sort likely to interest or please her. Now, as she listened attentively, even eagerly, to his conversation with Vivien, she began to reproach herself for her injustice toward her despised "knight of the knapsack," as she had dubbed him, and to wish that she had the power, which Vivien seemed to possess in such perfection, of stimulating him to pour out those entrancing stories, those brilliant, racy descriptions of strange lands and stranger scenes. Even Ormerod's presence at her side failed to dull that momentary pang of jealousy. Besides, Felix seemed out of spirits; he talked little, looked pale, abstracted, and alto-

gether unlike himself. Compared with that brilliant talker opposite, he seemed almost dull.

Lady Villebois, whose attention had hitherto been monopolized by her host, also grew interested in Atherstone's stories, and little by little the conversation from being general became particular. Atherstone talked and the rest listened.

"One of the oddest men I ever met in the whole course of my travels," he was saying to Vivien at the moment when his auditors were hushed to silence, "was a wretched, half-starved creature I fell in with at Denver. He had evidently seen better days at one period of his life. His education was good, and his talents remarkable in their way. He was the deadest shot, the coolest swordsman, and the most fearless rider to be met with between New York and 'Frisco, and that is saying something. But for one vice, that man might have carved his way to fortune, to a seat in Congress likely enough, for all things are possible in the States to a man of talent and perseverance; if he is not over-scrupulous, all the better—that will tell rather for than against him out there.

"Jim Halfer—that was what he called himself, though I knew afterward it was a pseudonym—might at this moment be a millionaire with a palace in Fifth Avenue, an *hôtel* in Paris, a yacht at Cowes, and a villa somewhere on the Riviera—might have, in short, all that make life pleasant to a successful man—had not the demon of strong drink had him in thrall. I never saw a man give himself over so entirely to the Brandy-Fiend as did poor Jim Halfer—but I need not go into details. You can guess how he sank inch by inch into the slough of poverty, degradation, and finally of semi-idiocy. The wretched creature was at last attacked by delirium tremens, and, as medical skill was then at a premium in Denver City, I—for lack of a better—was called to his bedside.

"I found him in a state of such utter destitution that common humanity forced me to furnish him with the actual necessaries of life during his illness. He had been employed and took good wages as a billiard-maker, but

his earnings had all been squandered in drink. The woman in whose house he lodged helped to nurse him, for she had a kind heart under a rough exterior; and in a few weeks poor Halfer, looking the ghost of his former self, was able to crawl out into the sunshine. I had drawn from him a promise that he would never touch another glass of brandy; but I confess I doubted his ability to keep his word, for nothing is so difficult to cure as inebriety when it has reached a certain point. I determined, therefore, to spend as much time as possible with Jim, in the hope that my presence would put some sort of restraint upon him.

"For a whole fortnight he abstained, and during that time he confided to me a good deal of his past history. It seemed that he had been a solicitor in fair practice in London, but some transaction in which he had become involved had rendered it imperative that he should get out of the reach of the law. In America his career had been most extraordinary. At one time he joined a tribe of Indians; adopted their dress, fought and hunted with them until he picked a quarrel with one of the chiefs, and was forced to escape under cover of night to the nearest white settlement, where he represented himself as a prisoner, who, after a weary captivity, had eluded the vigilance of the Indians and got away with a whole skin. The settlers looked on him as a martyr, treated him with the greatest kindness, provided him with clothes and money, and sent him on the first opportunity to San Francisco, where, for a time, he led a tolerably easy life as a dry-goods store employee. But his drunken habits soon got him into trouble; he was ignominiously dismissed from his post, and so was again adrift."

"Poor creature! did he ever tell you his real name?" asked Vivien, pityingly.

"I am coming to that," said Atherstone, gravely. "At first, when I pressed him to tell me his real name, he seemed unwilling to confide in me so far, though he told me himself that the name by which he was known in Denver City was not his own. But when he knew himself to be dying he revealed the long-kept secret."

"Perhaps he was delirious," said Le Marchant, suddenly; "dying men often are."

The remark was so strange, coming from a man of his habitual taciturnity, that the eyes of every one at the table were turned upon him. Even Selina looked surprised at her lord's abrupt words. Lady Villebois, ever on the watch to detect any sign of weakness in the man she had always distrusted, and now cordially disliked, noticed that his red-brown eyes had an uneasy, shifty expression, that his dark skin had faded to a dull, sickly white, and his lips twitched nervously. That Atherstone's narrative should have such an overpowering effect on an impassive individual like Le Marchant was odd.

"No; the man was not delirious," replied Ralph, coldly, "he was, on the contrary, quite calm, and in full possession of his senses for hours before he died."

"Oh, he died, did he?" said Le Marchant, with a slight effort. "Not a thing to grieve over, considering his miserable life."

The words were spoken quietly, but on the speaker's face was an unmistakable look of relief. The look did not escape Lady Villebois' quick eye.

"You have not told us the man's real name yet," she said, turning eagerly to Atherstone.

"Jabez Rudd."

"A curious name."

"Yes," assented Le Marchant, with white, dry lips. "I never remember to have heard it before."

Lady Villebois looked keenly at him; his eyes fell before hers. She knew he lied.

"Jabez Rudd; it *is* a curious name," she mused. "I shall bear it in mind. I wonder what is the link that connects this man with Le Marchant?"

CHAPTER III.

IS IT LOVE?

AFTER luncheon, Vivien contrived to slip out of the drawing-room and escape upstairs to her own room. Like many people long used to solitude, whenever anything moved her, or whenever a new phase of existence began, she longed to get away by herself and think the matter quietly out. At such moments the presence of others was irksome, because it prevented that intense concentration of mind necessary for the satisfactory elucidation of those life-problems which then presented themselves to her.

That afternoon Vivien had many things to think about, many difficulties to solve. So it was with a feeling of relief that she closed and locked her door and knew that she was secure from intrusion. Drawing a chair to the window, which commanded a fine view of the park, she sat down and rested her head on her hand. The feeling of sadness which had been lessened by Atherstone's volubility returned with greater intensity; that strange, vague presentiment of coming trouble, which had possessed her since this visit to the Towers had been decided on, began to take a definite shape. She knew that the true reason of her unwillingness to accept the Le Marchants' hospitality was because she shrank from meeting Ormerod again. But she had never dared to ask herself in plain words why she did so. She thrust the question resolutely from her whenever it presented itself to her mind. Now it rose again and rebelliously demanded an answer. Why should she wish to avoid her friend?—was he not her friend still? Was it fair that she should turn from him at a moment when it was plain to the dullest observer that some trouble overshadowed his life? True, he seemed to avoid her; but was it not part of her duty as a friend to win his confidence, and if possible help him to bear the trouble, whatever it was?

It was not in Vivien's nature to cherish a feeling of

resentment against Ormerod because he had not told her of his engagement to Sybil. She felt hurt at first, but that was all. Now she really wished to serve him, really wished his happiness to be secure, honestly hoped that his marriage would turn out well, in spite of Lady Villebois' gloomy prognostications. Woman-like, she blinded herself to the true state of affairs. No thought of love had yet ruffled the smooth current of her life, and her imagination, vivid as it was, had never led her to dream of the change which the master-passion makes in a woman's existence.

It must be remembered that Vivien had not had the varied experience of a young lady reared in an atmosphere redolent of flirtation. It must also be remembered that early sorrow tends rather to brace the mental powers and strengthen character than to cultivate the emotions. At an age when most girls in society have had the experience which even one London season brings, she was as simple as a child in many of her ideas. It did not, for instance, strike her that in playing the part of Ormerod's friend and of Sybil's confidante her own peace of mind was endangered. Habituated, as she was, to ignore self and selfish thoughts, such an idea, even had it presented itself, would have been scouted and sternly set aside. She sincerely desired to do what was right. The great difficulty was to be able to judge clearly how she might best serve her two friends.

With regard to Sybil, she had little cause for uneasiness; the girl's nature was so transparent that she flattered herself she had probed its deepest depths, that she knew every trait of her character, her hopes, almost her thoughts.

Vivien's experience of character-reading was too limited for her to have learned that even the least complex nature holds possibilities and capabilities that no human eye or brain can penetrate or comprehend. It seemed to her that Sybil's love for Ormerod was the strongest feeling her heart was capable of. She did not know that Sybil loved the love rather than the lover: that Ormerod's devotion flattered her vanity and pleased her chiefly

because it was gratifying to her self-esteem to be petted and admired by a man of his stamp.

Vivien's quick sympathies had been enlisted in Sybil's behalf because she knew that the poor child had suffered considerably in the past from the somewhat cold if not harsh treatment she had met with at her parents' hands; consequently, she felt that Ormerod's betrothed was entitled to all the affection it must be his delight to lavish on her. As Sybil had known so little happiness during the years of her girlhood, it was only just that her married life should be cloudless.

But then that tiresome thought again thrust itself on her. Was Ormerod happy, too? That perplexing question kept recurring to her mind with wearying iteration. Was he happy?—happy as Sybil's accepted lover ought to be?

She buried her face in her hands as if to shut out the remembrance of his pale visage and sad eyes. How changed he was from the calm, self-confident Ormerod of a few weeks ago! What had wrought this change?

It was impossible to come to a satisfactory solution of the mystery. Vivien thought over it until her head ached, and then that other tiresome question forced its way to the front and demanded an answer. Why had she felt so reluctant to meet the man she liked to think of as her friend?

At last, wearied out by the tension of her mind, Vivien rose with a heavy sigh and looked out across the park. It was a beautiful afternoon; the sky was brilliant, and a fresh breeze rustled the leaves of the grand old oaks. A sudden impulse prompted her to don her hat. She would pay a visit to the Retreat. The quiet of the place, and the associations which rendered it almost sacred in her eyes, would surely dissipate the troubled thoughts which harassed and perplexed her. Unlocking the door, she stole quietly down the long, silent corridors, down the grand staircase, across the Gothic hall, and with some difficulty found her way to a glass door which Sybil had told her led out into the most retired part of the garden. She was particularly anxious to avoid meeting any one,

and she knew that, as the drawing-room windows looked out on the terrace, it would not be easy to escape observation unless she could get out by the back of the house. Congratulating herself on having made good her retreat, she hurried across the garden to a small gate which she rightly guessed led to the narrow path she had traversed with Le Marchant on her first visit to the Towers. This would lead her direct to the corner of the park where the Retreat was situated.

The fresh air had already done her good; the feeling of depression gave place to a brighter mood. She could again think clearly and calmly, but she resolutely put aside those perplexing questions which had troubled her all the afternoon. Vivien was in the habit of exercising a vigorous control over her thoughts, and was consequently able to turn them firmly away from any train of ideas it seemed inadvisable to pursue. She had decided that for the present it was impossible to arrive at any conclusion on the subject, so she wisely resolved to dismiss it from her mind.

Her thoughts, suddenly diverted from the channel in which they had run all the afternoon, turned off abruptly in a new direction. Atherstone's conversation at luncheon, and particularly that story of his about the broken-down adventurer of Denver City, suddenly flashed into her recollection, and an entirely new train of ideas was suggested to her. Le Marchant's curious eagerness to hear how the outcast had ended his miserable career, the look of relief which had momentarily lighted his face when he heard of the man's death, had not escaped her. She wondered why the master of Dallas Towers should feel any interest in the fate of one who, to all appearances, could have no connection with his own fortunes.

Other thoughts had, for the moment driven the circumstance from her mind, but now, as she walked slowly across the park, she recalled it. She resolved to ask Lady Villebois on the first opportunity if she also had noted Le Marchant's odd behavior. That quick-witted observer did not often allow things to escape her, and no doubt she had drawn her own conclusions as to the cause

of their host's mental perturbation. Vivien had the greatest faith in the penetration of the kind-hearted if sharp-tongued lady who had so generously taken up the cudgels in her behalf.

In that matter of her own possible claim to the Dallas estates, she was far from sanguine. Besides, she disliked the idea of acting in any way against Sybil's father; it smacked of treachery to her friend, and, had not Lady Villebois exercised the full force of her influence over her, it is certain that those inquiries regarding her grandfather's last days would never have been made—and this history would never have been written. As Tristram Lowry's daughter, Vivien felt that she could never bring herself to like or even tolerate the man who had driven him to his death; but she had no wish to avenge the wrong done to him by bringing Le Marchant to poverty, social ruin, and disgrace—disgrace that would reflect on his wife and daughter.

Musing thus, Vivien had unconsciously diverged from the path which led to the Retreat. She wandered on quite at random across the velvety turf oblivious of the fact that every step she took was leading her away from the quiet haven she sought. At last the sound of voices roused her from her reverie, and, before she had time to retreat, she saw and recognized two people whose *tête-à-tête* was apparently so absorbing that they were unaware of her approach. Seated on the gnarled roots of a giant oak-tree were Ormerod and Sybil.

Vivien, uncertain whether to advance or retire, stood for a moment in some embarrassment. The color rushed to her cheeks; a sudden shyness seemed to paralyze her.

"Felix, do you know I should like to make you jealous, just to pique you into loving me—as—as I thought you did when you talked to me on the terrace last June?"

Sybil's voice had a ring of pathetic reproach that made Ormerod glance quickly and inquiringly into her face. Something he read there sent a thrill of self-accusation through him; a sudden impulse moved him. He drew Sybil's head to his breast and kissed her gently on her brow and lips.

"My little Sybil, you know I love you."

Vivien, standing there under the broad shade of the oak-trees, heard the words he uttered, and saw the caress so lovingly given. A sudden pang of anguish shook her. A terrifying, sickening feeling of dread—dread of herself—overpowered her as she turned and fled from the spot. Great Heaven! what madness was this? With her brain whirling, and her heart beating so loudly and tumultuously that the very air seemed to quiver with its pulsations, she stumbled on, until at last, faint and exhausted by the violence of her emotion, she paused and leaned against the bole of "an immemorial elm"—a grand old tree which had stood there for centuries, while men and women lived and suffered, and loved, and died, fretting away their lives in the feverish search for that elusive something men call happiness.

Vivien leaned her head on the rugged bark of the grand old tree, and looked up through the interstices of its thick leafage to the serene summer sky beyond. It steadied her to look up at those flickering green leaves, at those patches of blue. The awful feeling of aloneness which had fallen on her as she fled from those two passed away. She clasped one arm round the massive girth of the elm-bole as if it had been a sentient thing that could help her to bear her sorrow; as if contact with its rugged strength must give vigor to her trembling frame and courage to her sinking heart. As she rested her tired body against the tree, the dizziness cleared away from her brain, the power of coherent thought returned, and with it came an overpowering sense of shame. She bowed her head and hid her face against the friendly tree. The question she had asked herself so often was answered: she knew now why she had shrunk from meeting Ormerod at the Towers.

As that sudden pang of jealousy—yes, she would at least be honest with herself, she would give it its right name—had torn her heart, Vivien knew the truth. She loved this man—loved the man who was to be Sybil's husband. Oh, the bitter humiliation of such a confession!

Seen by the light of her present knowledge, every little

event of her life since she first saw Ormerod wore a new aspect. As she stood there with the sunlight darting its long golden arrows down through the quivering green leaves until they touched her bowed head, and glorified it with a nimbus of light, she mentally lived the past few weeks over again. The bright June day when he had come to her across the sun-lit lawn at Rollestone House as she stood under the dark cedar-shade; their talk that afternoon and evening on the terrace—she could recall every word with painful clearness—the day they met again in Lady Villebois' drawing-room; their adventure in the Lambeth slums; her promise to be his friend always. Every scene rose vividly before her; every look and gesture of his, every change of expression, every inflection of tone came back to her.

How she had deceived herself! From the first hour of their meeting she had loved him, and she had foolishly thought she would be content with his friendship. How blind she had been—and how wicked! That was the bitterest thought of all: the man she loved was Sybil's promised husband. Sybil!—the girl who had confided in her, who had treated her as a beloved sister rather than as a friend! How could she meet Sybil's eyes *now!* Would not her guilt be written on her face so unmistakably that even Sybil, unsuspicious as she was, must read her miserable secret? If she despised herself for her weakness and her folly, would not Sybil despise her, too?

Lifting her head from her hands, Vivien looked around her with troubled eyes. The mere thought of meeting the gaze of curious eyes overwhelmed her with shame and dread. She must fight out the battle with herself, alone and in silence. Where could she hide herself? Where could she find a refuge where she would be safe from all intrusion? As she glanced about her, with the frightened, startled gaze of a wild bird caught in a snare, her eyes fell on a clump of trees to the right, and through the thick curtain of leaves she could just distinguish the outlines of a small stone building. With a low exclamation of relief, she hurried toward it. There was a haven where she might hide her anguish; there no prying eyes

could watch her. There, among the relics of her mother's youth, calmer thoughts would come, and with them strength to thrust away those haunting memories of words and scenes that must henceforth be buried in oblivion.

As on a former occasion, the door yielded to her hand, and she entered the Retreat with something of the reverent awe of a devotee before a shrine. The very air of the place seemed to calm her nerves. The utter silence which reigned in the forsaken studio, where Catherine had once dreamed love's young dream, soothed Catherine's daughter in the hour of her deepest distress. The memories associated with every neglected, dust-covered book and picture her mother's hands had touched brought the relief of tears to her dry, aching eyes. As the great drops gathered and fell, the dark clouds of despair lifted, and a faint gleam of hope shone on the dull wretchedness of her mind. She had been disloyal to Sybil, but she would atone: she loved, but she would conquer her love. She would school herself to put away every thought of self; she would be Sybil's faithful sister—Ormerod's friend still. If her heart bled under the severity of the discipline—if she suffered, why, suffer she must: it would be a fitting punishment for her wicked folly.

No one should ever know of her madness. The possibility of such a catastrophe brought the hot color to her cheek; the mere thought that Ormerod himself might guess her secret was a moral torture to her. She would die rather than let him know it. Surely she had enough of womanly dignity and self-control to hide her feelings. But if the strain proved too much for her, if her strength failed, she would go out into the world again, and learn in the stern struggle of a life of poverty and work how to conquer self. Lady Villebois would give her back her liberty, and she would return to Camberwell, and work for her living among the people who had befriended her when she was left alone in the world. The past few months would be a closed chapter in her history, whose leaves she would not turn until she had courage to think calmly of its leading episode.

"That will be best," she thought, with a sudden longing for the peaceful little parlor behind the book-shop, where she had dreamed happy dreams over the dingy volumes which formed the old bookseller's stock-in-trade. "I will go away and forget all this. I must have work to do; something to think about; something to drive all this folly from my mind."

But it was all very well to plan out this new scheme; it was absolutely impossible to carry it out at once. To begin with, she was pledged to spend a week at Dallas Towers, and, without some plausible excuse, it would be difficult to parry the searching questions which Sybil and Lady Villebois would put to her. What reason could she give for such an inexplicable freak? She pressed both hands to her forehead, and racked her brain for some explanation which would stand the test of close questioning. But no, there seemed no way out of the difficulty, no loophole by which she could escape rom her present position. She must go straight on, and face her troubles as best she might. For a week, at least, she must bear her burden in silence and with a brave heart; must put a watch on herself; must talk to Sybil about her approaching marriage; smile as she listened to her *naive* confidences; speak words of conventional vapidity to the man who had won her heart and made her taste the bitterness of knowing that while she loved him as a woman rarely loves—tenderly, unselfishly, purely—he cared for her only as a friend. A friend!—the title she had once delighted to give him seemed an empty mockery to her now, for a man must be something more or less than a friend to the woman who loves him.

A week!—it would be a fiery ordeal, but it must be borne, and bravely borne, though every hour spent with Ormerod would be fraught with suffering. But Vivien, like the brave-hearted woman she was, made up her mind that the task she had set herself must be performed. Like Damien, on the morning of the day when death was to come to him in horrible guise, she thought the week would be long, but it would have an end. When those seven weary days were over, she might creep away

somewhere and rest. Then she must begin her life again, and the past must be forgotten.

At last she roused herself and rose to her feet. The shadows were already lengthening, and her limbs felt tired. It must be late; she would be missed and perhaps sought for. She smoothed her ruffled hair with her trembling hands, and wondered nervously if her eyes were red. It would be better to run the chance of meeting any one in the park than to linger longer there. She moved toward the door, opened it slowly, and passed out into the brilliant evening light.

CHAPTER IV.

COUNTY MAGNATES.

"*Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coute.*" Vivien found that, her first meeting with Ormerod and Sybil over, the difficulties of the task of self-repression she had imposed on herself were by no means insuperable. On returning to the house she contrived to slip up to her own room unobserved, and thus gained time to compose her features before subjecting them to the scrutiny of Mrs. Le Marchant and her guests. After carefully washing the traces of tears from her cheeks, she put on her dinner-dress and felt more confidence in her powers of dissimulation.

The looking-glass did not reveal any startling change in her personal appearance. She looked a trifle pale and heavy-eyed, but the usual feminine excuse of a headache would account for that. Hoping to enter the drawing-room under cover of the friendly twilight, she went down without waiting for Sybil, who was humming a tune as she dressed in the next room. But, unfortunately for her project, Vivien met Le Marchant as she was crossing the hall. In the dim lamp-light she tried to slip past him, but that sharp-eyed individual was too astute to let an opportunity pass of making himself agreeable to the girl he was so anxious to conciliate.

"Is that you, Miss Lowry?" he said, suavely; "this

big old hall is so difficult to light properly that we are obliged to put up with this semi-darkness. By-the-by, I don't think I have done the honors of the place. Will you walk round the hall? We shall have nearly half an hour before dinner."

Not knowing what excuse to offer, Vivien listened patiently to Le Marchant's platitudes on the subject of Gothic architecture in general and the Gothic hall in particular, until Sybil came tripping down the grand staircase and released her.

"My dear Vivien, where have you been hiding all the afternoon?" she said, brightly, linking her arm affectionately in Vivien's. "Felix and I scoured the park in search of you."

"I had rather a headache," said Vivien, in a low voice, "so I indulged in a solitary walk."

"Poor darling! I hope the headache has gone now," murmured Sybil, sympathetically.

"Yes—almost."

"Papa has been boring you, hasn't he?" (this in a confidential whisper).

"N—no."

"I thought he had, because you look so pale."

Vivien managed to smile, and the two girls entered the drawing-room together.

Sybil seemed in unusually brilliant spirits that evening; she looked charmingly pretty, too, in her white silk gown. Round her throat she had fastened the pearl necklace that had been Ormerod's betrothal gift. With her curly brown locks clustering about her smooth, child-like forehead, her fresh, rosy lips smiling, her eyes bright with happiness and animation, she looked so bewitching that any slight defect of feature was forgotten. Even sober Ralph Atherstone seemed to feel the charm of her girlish beauty as she sat between Ormerod and him at dinner, and talked gayly to both. What if she were not so intelligent a listener as Vivien—a man does not always care to be put on his conversational mettle. Atherstone found it quite as agreeable to descend to the mental level

of his pretty neighbor, as it had been to be stimulated to talk brilliantly by the sympathetic attention of the handsome girl he had sat near at luncheon. It was really a pleasure to remain passive while Sybil kept him amused by the *naiveté* of her remarks, and something more than a pleasure to watch her bright, piquant, sparkling little face.

In honor of Lady Villebois' visit, Mrs. Le Marchant felt it incumbent upon her to make some exertion to entertain her distinguished guest. She had therefore invited some half-dozen of their nearest neighbors to dine and sleep at the Towers. These additional guests, though not individually brilliant, brought grist to the conversational mill, and thus added considerably to the apparent festivity of the meal.

Theobald Marston, J. P.—a ruddy-cheeked, gray-haired country squire—did not talk with the cleverness of a professional diner-out; he had no carefully-prepared *bon-mots* to let off, no epigrams, no witty anecdotes, but his ringing, jolly laugh was pleasant to hear, and he ate his dinner and drank his wine with such evident gusto, that it did you good to look at him. His wife was a somewhat stiff but stately dame, with an overweening sense of her own importance. She married Theobald Marston with a settled determination to rule the matrimonial roost, and he, like a good fellow as he was, had such thorough confidence in the superior talents of his Lucy, that the said Lucy had had things pretty much her own way from the hour she first crossed the threshold of her husband's house. The sons and daughters who had been born to them had never ventured to question their mother's authority. Mrs. Marston at fifty was as thorough an autocrat as she had been at five-and-twenty. Time certainly had not diminished her confidence in herself, or her consciousness of the important position she filled in the county.

The Marstons were an old family, but the house of Mountcashel was something superlative in the way of antiquity. Mrs. Marston had been a Miss Mountcashel, and she seldom lost an opportunity of bringing that im-

portant fact to your notice. Ill-natured people said she was accustomed to sit alone for an hour or so every morning and meditate on the grandeur of all the Mountcashels who slept their last sleep in the family vault at Mountcashel Abbey, and on the reflected glory which shone on her own head from that illustrious ancestry. But that must have been pure calumny; for Mrs. Marston was a very busy woman, who looked well to the ways of her household, and liked to have a finger in the pie when her husband proposed to lay out a few thousands in drainage or cottage-building.

She was a handsome woman still, with bright, clear gray eyes, smooth brown hair (unflecked as yet with gray), aquiline features of the true patrician type, a fresh complexion, and a figure that erred perhaps a trifle in the matter of stateliness; but Lucy Marston had always prided herself on the dignity of her carriage, and she had no notion of adopting any new-fangled ideas about "grace." In the days when she was the belle of Cornshire, it was a golden rule that a woman's deportment should do credit to the long course of back-board which she, in common with all well-brought-up young ladies, underwent in the school-room.

It was one of the few disappointments of Mrs. Marston's life that in spite of all her care; in spite of a prolonged course of drilling, and calisthenics, and dumbbells; and in spite of the admirable example before their eyes, her daughter did not carry themselves with the dignity befitting the descendants of Sir Raoul de Mountcashel. This—and all other deficiencies—was put down by their mother to the fact that their paternal ancestors had never been remarkable for the distinguished bearing that had always stamped the Mountcashels.

Since her marriage, Mrs. Marston had not seen much of society beyond the limits of the county. Of the great world of London and its varied phases of life, she knew little or nothing. Her visits to the metropolis were usually restricted to a week or two during the season. By-and-by, when her daughters should be of an age to be launched on the social sea, whose port is matrimony, the

Marstons would take a house in Mayfair, and go through the regulation round of gayeties in the regulation way. But the Misses Marston, figuratively speaking, had not yet left the educational "stocks," the gay craft which were to breast the waves of a sea which even to descendants of the Mountcashels is not always smooth, were not yet ready for that momentous event; so their mother wisely resolved to stay quietly at home, and be as economical as her husband's passion for high-farming would permit.

Lady Villebois' reputation as a leader of society had not reached Marston Hall, and the mistress of that historic mansion looked somewhat askance at the lively old lady whose keen blue eyes shot half-satiric, half-amused glances in her direction. Was it possible that she could be laughing at her, Lucy Marston—at her, the representative of the Mountcashels? The very thought of such unseemly levity made the good lady's back stiffen as she pressed her lips together and glanced defiantly across at Lady Villebois.

Le Marchant, with a vivid recollection of various occasions on which it had devolved upon him to entertain Mrs. Marston, was delighted that the laws of precedence decreed that Lady Villebois should occupy the seat of honor on his right. Her quick wit amused him and kept him in an unusual state of good-humor, and, all considerations of prudence apart, he really tried to make himself agreeable to her. Mrs. Marston, feeling neglected and altogether out of her element—for they talked of people and places of which she knew nothing—allowed herself to be monopolized by the rector of Dalthorpe, a meek little man of good family and no particular talents, who had had the honor of taking her in to dinner.

The rest of the party included a handsome, soldier-like old general, and his wife, a pale, flaxen-haired woman who copied Mrs. Le Marchant's style of dress—a species of tacit flattery which that lady secretly resented—and the rector's wife, a stalwart female who ruled her lord with a rod of iron. The conversation was about up to the standard of that heard at most country-house dinners

there was the usual amount of county gossip with the usual leaven of political small talk.

Ormerod looked slightly bored. "This sort of thing," as he phrased it, was not at all in his line. If a series of these dinners was an indispensable concomitant to his position as M. P. for Compton Magna, he began to think the price of that position was in excess of its value.

Vivien was relieved to find that her hostess had sent her in to dinner with a heavy-faced, dull-eyed young man who was introduced as Mr. Mountcashel Marston. The hopeful heir of the two illustrious families, whose united honors he was one day destined to wear, was by no means a formidable individual, physically or mentally. His monosyllabic conversation made little demand on her attention, and his stolid good-humor fairly set her at her ease. There was no fear that any traces of emotion which a quick eye might detect in her face would be observed by Mr. Mountcashel Marston, for his whole soul seemed concentrated in the business of dinner.

The general, who sat on her left, was engaged in a lively discussion about parochial matters with the rector's wife, so she was left to pursue her own reflections in peace. Ormerod was hidden from her by a pyramid of flowers and ferns, so that matters were altogether better than she had hoped, and she already congratulated herself on the comparative tranquillity that had come to her.

When the ladies had retired from the dinner-table, and betaken themselves to the drawing-room with the usual flutter of laces and rustle of silk attendant on that feminine Hegira, Sybil seated herself at her side and whispered a few words of inquiry about that "tiresome headache of hers."

"You looked so pale at dinner, dear, I was quite unhappy about you," she said, sympathetically, with that slight perversion of truth of which young ladies are sometimes guilty. "I hope you will be better to-morrow, because mamma has actually got up an impromptu picnic—a thing I know she detests—solely in your honor. I believe, though, it was originally papa's idea—do you know, you have really made a conquest of my respected

pater? I never saw him so civil to any one before. Yes," she went on, gravely nodding her head, "I assure you it is a fact. Papa has 'taken to you,' as my old nurse used to say. Do you feel honored?"

A shadow fell on Vivien's face, and she turned away her head to hide the expression of dislike she knew was written there. Le Marchant's suave civilities disgusted and at the same time puzzled her.

"I won't press you for an answer," Sybil went on, in a bantering tone, "but seriously, dear, you must get rid of that headache, because I want you to enjoy our expedition to Oak Hill Wood to-morrow. By-the-by, I hope we shall have fine weather. Let us go out on the terrace, Vivien, for a few minutes and see if it looks promising."

The night was warm, and several of the long windows stood open. The two girls passed out and slowly paced up and down in the star-light. The trees in the park looked black against the clear-obscure of the quiet night sky; not a breath of wind stirred the leaves.

"What a lovely night!" said Vivien, looking up at the "glimmering orbs" which studded the vast expanse of cloudless sky.

"Yes, I think we may count on a fine day to-morrow," remarked Sybil, in a matter-of-fact tone; her thoughts were still running on the proposed excursion. Social festivities were not too frequent at that time of the year in Grasshire, and she looked forward to this picnic with almost childish eagerness.

"Vivien, how quiet you are to-night," she said, when they had paced silently up and down for some minutes. "I thought you would be pleased about the picnic," she added, in a hurt tone, "but you don't seem to care about it."

"Yes, I do," said Vivien, quickly, blushing as she uttered the fib; "what made you think I was not pleased?"

"You looked troubled, almost vexed, when I mentioned it at first."

It was true: Sybil's joyous announcement had filled her with dismay, because she knew that for the whole of one long summer day it would be almost impossible to

avoid Ormerod. In all probability they would be seated in the same carriage, for Sybil would certainly arrange that her friend should go with her, and Ormerod would naturally be in attendance on his betrothed.

The idea of excusing herself on the plea of illness crossed Vivien's mind, only to be quickly dismissed as impracticable. The last thing she wished was to attract attention to herself, and her absence from the picnic would certainly be remarked, and possibly commented on. The consciousness that she had something to hide made her nervously apprehensive lest any act, or word, or look of hers should betray her secret. She felt oppressed and weighed down by a sense of her own guilt and folly. Now that she was alone with Sybil, the painfulness of her position toward her friend came home to her anew.

"Don't you care about the picnic?" persisted Sybil, misinterpreting the other's silence.

"I like anything that will give you pleasure. If you enjoy yourself, I shall enjoy myself, too," replied Vivien, evasively, despising herself for being hypocritical as well as untruthful.

And with this unsatisfactory answer Sybil was fain to be content.

CHAPTER V.

CYMON AND IPHIGENIA.

THE next morning the sun shone out with the promise of a glorious day. So far as the weather was concerned, it was evident that the picnic would be a success. The golden uprising of the sun was watched with very different feelings by the two girls. Sybil was radiant with glee as she opened her window to let in a flood of sunlight; while Vivien, who had passed a sleepless night, felt a vague hope she had cherished die within her—a hope that a morning of rain and storm would put a stop to the proposed excursion. Bracing herself to meet the inevitable, she rose and dressed and then leaned both arms on the window-sill and looked out at the brilliant

blue sky. Not a cloud was to be seen. The breeze which fanned her hot, aching forehead was balmy with the breath of flowers and fresh with the dewy coolness of early morning, but she turned from the window with an aching heart. She would far rather have looked on the gray gloom of November than on that radiant summer sky; rather have felt a chill autumn blast than that perfumed breeze.

"What a selfish creature I am!" she murmured, remorsefully, as she thought of Sybil—Sybil in her brightest, gayest, most winsome mood. "Why should I wish to spoil the enjoyment of perhaps twenty people, just because I shrink from what I richly deserve—a little pain? Come, let there be an end of this cowardice—I *will* root out a love that is wicked, foolish, and disloyal."

Though Vivien made the resolution bravely enough and sincerely enough, there was a latent conviction in her heart that the love she stigmatized as "wicked, foolish, and disloyal" was a noble and ennobling passion that neither time nor absence would change. Save that one brief pang of jealousy, no leaven of selfishness mingled with her love for Ormerod. A feeling of intense thankfulness filled her as she thought that he was spared the anguish she suffered. Sybil's affection sufficed for his happiness; life stretched bright and fair before him; there were no clouds of doubt over his future.

Full of her new resolution, Vivien looked round the room in search of something to divert her thoughts from the forbidden channel. Her eyes lighted on a row of gayly-bound volumes on the dainty little writing-table. She rose and chose one at random. It was that grand prose epic, "Romola." Vivien had heard of the book, but had never read it. She turned the first few pages carelessly, but as she went on her attention was arrested, and ere she had finished the first chapter she had forgotten her present surroundings, forgotten her anxieties. She was at Florence, living in the Middle Ages, and almost as happy as when, in the little back-shop at Camberwell, the world of books was her only world.

When Vivien went down to breakfast, she found most of the guests already assembled. Mrs. Marston, looking stiffer and statelier than ever in her morning-gown and cap, was carrying on a one-sided discussion with her host, who listened to her with languid interest. Mrs. Le Marchant, arrayed in an artistically juvenile costume of pale gray, was already seated at the head of the table before a quaint Queen Anne service of antique silver—one of the many heirlooms bequeathed by James Dallas to his nephew. As she shook hands with Vivien, Mrs. Le Marchant's cold eyes scrutinized the pale face of her guest with some curiosity. She had never liked her daughter's friend. To a woman of her temperament there was something vaguely antipathetic, something hurtful to her own *amour-propre* in this serene-eyed, clear-browed girl whose quiet dignity of mien deprecated patronage. It vexed her to think that any woman should possess not only mental powers superior to her own, but—what she valued far more—beauty and youth and freshness.

Vivien, though at a loss to understand why Sybil's mother disliked her, was perfectly conscious of the fact. As she met Mrs. Le Marchant's keen gaze she felt she would need all her powers of self-control to hide her secret from those cold, curious eyes. It was an effort to talk naturally in Mrs. Le Marchant's presence; it was difficult to keep up any semblance of cordiality toward her hostess, and it was trebly difficult to meet Ormerod while those inquisitive gray eyes watched her.

Much to her surprise, the heavy-faced young man who had taken her in to dinner on the previous evening proved an invaluable and unexpected ally. Breakfast not being so absorbingly important an affair as dinner, young Marston allowed his attention to wander from his plate to Vivien, who, seeing an unoccupied chair by his side, had seated herself therein, partly because her experience overnight had shown her that Mr. Mountcashel Marston would not be an exacting neighbor conversationally, partly because the chair was at a considerable distance from Ormerod's.

"Splendid day for a picnic, Miss Lowry," began the

heir of the Marstons, by way of opening the conversation. "Fond of picnics?"

"I have never been to one," replied Vivien, smiling.

"No, really now?"

"I have always lived in London, Mr. Marston," she said, gravely, as he opened his round blue eyes wonderingly at her.

"No; have you, though? Always?"

"Yes, always, until a few weeks ago."

"But how about hunting? How did you manage about that?" It had never entered into the philosophy of this young man to imagine a life spent without the joys of hunting; to him such a life would distinctly *not* be worth living.

"I don't hunt," replied Vivien, coolly. "I have never been on a horse in my life."

"You don't mean to say you don't ride," he cried, aghast. "Why, why," he added, with a glance at the supple figure near him, "I should have thought—"

Vivien laughed, as he paused awkwardly, and then went on, with unusual animation:

"Let me teach you, Miss Lowry. I have a beautiful little mare, just suitable for a lady. I'll get her used to a habit, and then—"

"You are very kind."

"Oh, I shall be delighted—and the mare doesn't get half enough exercise." Then, with a dash at what he felt was a bold request, he added, "May I ride over to Mordaunt's Rest on the mare one day—just to show her to you? Then you can think it over—I mean, whether you would care to ride her yourself."

Vivien, not being bound fast in the chains of conventionality, and in innocent unconsciousness that Mrs. Marston's eyes were riveted on her with a disapproving stare, that said as plainly as a stare could, "Who *is* this young woman, I wonder!" replied frankly:

"Oh, yes, come by all means; we shall be very pleased to see you."

Young Marston's heavy face brightened until it looked almost handsome: he thought Miss Lowry the nicest girl

he had ever met. How different she was from the young ladies he saw at the Grasshire dinner-parties and dances! She was certainly better-looking than the prettiest of them, and she was not shy or awkward or fast, as so many of the aforesaid young ladies were; she did not snub him, or "set her cap at him," as he elegantly phrased it, though she was both clever and handsome. (Marston had always made up his mind that clever and handsome women did either the one or the other.) He resolved to see as much as possible of Vivien during his stay at Dallas Towers.

Vivien, on the other hand, felt grateful because he had helped her to get over an unpleasant half-hour; and she smiled so kindly on him that the infatuated youth flattered himself that he had already made a favorable impression on her. Never had young Marston talked so much, at least, to a lady—he could be fluent enough in the smoking-room or the stable-yard, but the presence of the fairer half of creation generally reduced him to bashful and boorish silence.

When breakfast was over, and the ladies had retired to put on their bonnets—for the carriages had been ordered for ten o'clock—Marston hung about the Gothic hall with the intention of securing a seat in the same vehicle as Vivien. When that young lady appeared, still looking somewhat pale, but very lovely in a picturesque Gainsborough hat, she was at once taken possession of by her new admirer.

"Evidently, a case of Cymon and Iphigenia," muttered Le Marchant, whose lynx eyes had already noted young Marston's infatuation; "that fox-hunting lout is not the man to please a charming girl like Vivien," he mused, thus paying a mental tribute of admiration to Catherine's daughter.

In spite of himself, he felt a kindly interest in the girl; he really liked and admired her. For the first time in his life, he felt conscious of his own moral inferiority. His conscience pricked him for the part he had played twenty years ago. He felt uneasy as he watched Vivien's face. What a noble-looking creature she was! He

wished he could do something to repair the wrong he had done her. He would do anything short of— He checked himself sternly as a thought crossed his mind. It was sheer madness even to contemplate such a sacrifice. Anything but *that* he would do for Vivien.

He was resolved to settle a sum of money on her in such a manner that she would never know who was the giver. He knew that she would not alter her decision; that she would accept nothing from him. But he was determined to be her friend, whether she wished it or not.

His lip curled as he watched young Marston's clumsy endeavors to make himself agreeable to Vivien. He felt almost angry with the "fox-hunting lout" for daring to lift his eyes to her.

By the time the carriages came round to the door, most of the people had assembled. Sybil, radiant in a pink muslin gown, looked anxiously about for her friend.

"Felix, have you seen Vivien?" she asked of Ormerod, in an eager tone. "I want her to drive with us, and I am so afraid I shall miss her."

A peculiar expression crossed Ormerod's face, but he meekly proceeded to do as Sybil asked him. He glanced round the hall, and looked in several of the rooms leading out of it, but Vivien was nowhere to be seen.

"I can't find Miss Lowry," he said, when he returned. "Perhaps she has already started. I heard carriage-wheels a moment ago."

"Oh! I hope not," cried Sybil. "Perhaps she is on the terrace. Do go and look for her, Felix."

Ormerod had no excuse to offer. He went.

"Oh, the perversity of woman!" he thought, as he crossed the hall.

He was vexed with Sybil for placing him in so embarrassing a position. Why would she persist in making it so difficult for him to keep those good resolutions of his? He had tried so hard to avoid Vivien of late, because he knew that he was walking on the edge of a precipice; because he knew that a word, a look might undo the work of days of self-repression.

CHAPTER VI.

"IN LOVING THEE THOU KNOW'ST I AM FORSWORN."

ORMEROD went out on the terrace, and glanced quickly up and down in search of the stately figure he knew so well. He soon espied Vivien advancing toward him from the further end of the long terrace. Young Marston was at her side, talking with unusual animation. A shade of vexation crossed Ormerod's face. He halted in some hesitation, and watched the pair with eyes in which a sudden light kindled. Had Vivien looked up then, and met his eyes, she would have read something that would have startled her out of the passive calm which had come to her as a species of reaction after yesterday's emotional crisis. Whether the revelation would have brought her pleasure or pain, who shall say? The influences that mold the secret feelings of a woman's heart are too subtle to be justly analyzed. But Vivien's glance rested on the heavy countenance of young Marston, whose attempts at conversation she was good-naturedly assisting to the best of her power, supplying words when he paused helplessly in search of suitable means for expressing his thoughts, and piecing together his fragmentary remarks with such kindly tact that the poor boy was tempted to beg her acceptance of his heart and hand there and then.

"Is it possible she cares to listen to that idiot's cackle?" thought Ormerod, angrily, as he watched them. And then he fell to wondering bitterly what Vivien would think if she knew the secret he had shut away in one of those mysterious brain-cells where thought is garnered. Would she be angry, or vexed, or merely calmly indifferent? It was impossible to say. He knew little of women and their moods, but what elementary knowledge he had of that most complex subject could not be used as a standard whereby to judge a woman like Vivien Lowry. She was so unlike other women that he could form no conjecture as to the effect such a revelation would have on her. He knew that she was quixotic, that her ideas of life were exalted and somewhat visionary, that her nat-

ural bent of mind was rather toward self-sacrifice than toward selfishness. Once he had thought her cold, but he knew better now; he had seen those deep-gray eyes of hers kindle, seen the hot color rush into her cheeks when she was strangely moved; he had heard her speak as no cold, impassive woman could speak. No, whatever her faults, coldness was not one of them.

You see, Ormerod had a very limited experience of feminine human nature, or he would have known that a woman is always lenient to a man who loves her, whether she reciprocates the love or not. Vivien, however, was ignorant of the whole matter, so all conjectures were fruitless as to what she would think and how she would act if, in an unguarded moment, he betrayed himself.

And Sybil, poor child, how painful was his position toward her! Man-like, Ormerod was so assured of the poor child's unalterable affection for himself that he honestly believed any breach of faith on his part would be a fatal blow to her happiness. He had taken literally the pathetic reproach she had spoken yesterday, and he feared that Sybil really began to doubt his love. He had taken himself to task on the subject, and gravely tried to resuscitate some of the lover-like enthusiasm of a couple of months ago. But no, it would not do; he could deceive himself no longer. He had never really loved pretty Sybil; he had only liked and admired her. What a fool he had been to surrender his liberty! Why had he not waited a reasonable time before he took the decisive step of asking the "poor child" to marry him? Why had he put an insuperable barrier between himself and Vivien? Had he been a free man, he might have made it the ambition of his life to win her.

Ever since the truth dawned on him that he had found his ideal woman in Vivien Lowry, that the calm, sensible affection he had for Sybil was swept away in the strong tide of a passionate love for a woman who seemed as far above him as the stars in their courses, Ormerod had tormented himself with dreams of what might have been had he not bartered away his freedom for a vain shadow. He had pressed for an earlier day for the mar-

riage, with a dim sort of idea that things would be easier were the irrevocable step once taken.

"If it were done, 'twere well if 'twere done quickly;" the matrimonial chains once riveted, his love for Vivien *must* be conquered. Sybil would be his wife; a sense of honor would compel him to put away this new passion as one of the forbidden joys of life. The gulf between himself and Vivien would be so wide and deep that the very profundity of the chasm would scare him away from its verge. Since it had been settled that the wedding should take place in October, Ormerod had striven to trample down and utterly destroy the love which had sprung up in his path like some beautiful flower of magic growth. The rich fragrance, the glorious blossoms, were only so many temptations to dishonor; he would destroy both without mercy. But his good resolutions availed him nothing; the love-plant, quick of growth as it had been, had deep roots; he could crush it down, but he could not annihilate it. The first sight of Vivien's face, the touch of her hand, the sound of her voice when they met at Dallas Towers undid the patient work of days; and now he must begin again at the beginning: the work of destruction must be done anew.

Sybil, by sending him on his present errand, had made it all the harder for him. Since her arrival at the Towers, he had carefully avoided every opportunity of speech with Vivien, though he hungered for a word from her lips, for a single look from those deep, clear eyes of hers, and he hoped that he was really making some progress in his self-appointed task.

But it is one thing to surrender voluntarily a prize which is uncoveted by others, and another to see it grasped at by some one you think utterly unworthy of possessing it. Ormerod had thought it a difficult though not impossible thing to resign all hope of winning Vivien; but, when he saw "that lout Marston" obviously laying himself out to please her, anger and love had a strong tussle together in his heart. He looked at the approaching pair with strong disapproval written in his face, and in his inmost heart was glad that he had a plausible ex-

cuse for joining them, and interrupting their *tête-à-tête.* He hesitated no longer, but went boldly forward.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Lowry," he said, with rather overdone carelessness of manner. "I was sent in search of you by Miss Le Marchant, who, I believe, is anxious that you should drive with her to Oak Hill Wood. May I tell her that you will do so?"

Vivien colored slightly, but when she spoke her voice was quite steady.

"Certainly. I will come at once."

'She is vexed with me for interrupting her conversation with Marston," was his mental comment on her change of countenance, "though what on earth she can find to interest her in that unlicked cub passes my comprehension."

Ormerod turned and walked by Vivien's side, while the "unlicked cub," in blissful ignorance of the verdict just passed on him, tried to keep the conversational ball rolling with tolerable briskness. But without Vivien's aid he felt this task beyond his powers. He wondered why she had suddenly subsided into silence; surely it could not be because the presence of that conceited London dandy, who had chosen to join them, made her shy. A girl as clever and handsome as Miss Lowry must feel herself a match for any man. Perhaps she disliked him —girls luckily did not always admire those high and mighty fellows, who thought themselves so superior to the rest of mankind.

"And, after all, he didn't seem so very brilliant," mused young Marston; "why, he hadn't a word to say for himself—he was as mute as a fish."

The truth was that Ormerod was too angry to talk. He knew his anger was unreasonable and altogether unjustifiable. Of course Miss Lowry had a perfect right to talk to young Marston if she pleased. It was no business of his. And yet he was angry; he felt at odds with the world, discontented and unhappy.

Vivien was silent because she distrusted her power of self-command; it was so difficult to talk carelessly on

ordinary topics to the man whose presence caused her such strange commingling of pleasure and pain. Why had she allowed herself to be drawn into this false position? Why had she come to Dallas Towers? The five days which remained of her visit—days that must be lived through somehow—stretched out before her in a dreary perspective. Was there no escape? Must the difficult and dangerous path be trodden by her unwilling feet? If Ormerod would only go away! A wild idea flashed across her brain that she would appeal to the friendship he had professed for her, that she would ask him to leave the Towers.

But, if she did, what reason could she give for such a strange request? She pictured the calm surprise with which he would listen to her. Would he think her mad? Perhaps—and the thought brought a flood of color to her cheeks—he might guess her secret. The possibility of such a contingency was quite enough to chase away an idea so utterly and wildly impracticable. She racked her brain for a more feasible way of extricating herself from the difficulties which hemmed her in. But in vain; every avenue of escape seemed to be closed; she must stay where she was, and bear her burden with a brave face.

Ormerod, who had been covertly watching the rapid changes passing over her face, fell to wondering at the cause of her silence and evident trouble; surely vexation for such a trivial thing as an interrupted *tete-à-tete* with a comparative stranger would not wholly account for the signs of mental perturbation he read there. Her manner, too, puzzled him; the frank friendliness of former days had given place to a cold restraint that bordered on formality.

So those two—both harassed with a secret care, both conscientiously anxious to do what was right, but both isolated within the circle of their own existence—walked on, side by side, in utter ignorance of each other's thoughts and motives; while young Marston, in serene unconsciousness of the little drama that was going on near him, and though playing a *rôle* of no apparent importance, yet exerted the same negative influence that a

non-conductor does between two metals whose contact would strike the electric spark.

The three re-entered the house and joined the rest of the party in the Gothic hall. In the brief space of time that had elapsed since they left it, both Vivien and Ormerod knew that a change had taken place in their mutual relations; that the old footing of cordial friendship could never be wholly re-established, and that henceforth a barrier of some sort stood between them. How it had been reared neither understood, but that it existed both felt.

CHAPTER VII.

LADY VILLEBOIS IS DIPLOMATIC.

In pursuance of a course of action she had planned, Lady Villebois resolved to turn the day's amusement to some practical use. Ever since she heard Atherstone's story of the fate of the man Jabez Rudd, and watched its effect on the usually impassive and self-possessed master of the Towers, she had settled it in her own mind that Atherstone was the man who held the key of the whole mystery. On the previous evening she had had no opportunity of talking to him, but she hoped that during the course of the day she might seize a favorable moment for using her conversational weapons to some purpose. She felt convinced that the man who died in Denver City knew something Le Marchant wished to hide: or why had he looked so relieved when Atherstone spoke of Jabez Rudd's death? Was it not within the range of possibility that Rudd had confided to Atherstone some of the secrets of his past? At all events it would be worth her while to sound him on the subject.

When the carriages came round to the door—after watching with quiet amusement the small maneuvers practiced by various young ladies to secure the attendance of the particular swains of their choice, and the anxiety of their mammas to appropriate the most comfortable seat in Mrs. Le Marchant's barouche—Lady

Villebois contrived to elude that lady's eyes, knowing that the aforesaid place of honor was destined for herself. She had no wish to secure either the luxurious seat or Mrs. Le Marchant's charming society, though as the guest of the highest rank both had been allotted to her. With secret joy she saw Mrs. Marston take possession of the coveted position with a serene majesty of demeanor calculated to defy all attempts to dislodge her therefrom.

"Delightful woman! I am forever grateful to you," mentally ejaculated her ladyship. "Now to secure that charming Mr. Atherstone. I am an old woman and my wits are not so nimble as they once were, but I think I can amuse him enough to escape being thought a bore."

Her quick eyes roved eagerly about in search of Ralph's tall, solid form. As she glanced round the hall, she saw Vivien enter, with Ormerod and young Marston, and make her way to Sybil, who was sitting on one of the low divans chatting away in her liveliest manner to the very man Lady Villebois sought.

"How provoking! that little coquette is evidently bent on fascinating Mr. Atherstone, and judging from his face he seems to like the process."

With her usual acuteness she had guessed rightly. Atherstone looked radiant, and seemed bent on keeping his position at Sybil's side. But that impulsive young lady, catching sight of Vivien, jumped up and ran to her friend leaving poor Atherstone looking somewhat crestfallen.

"Oh, I am so glad you have not started," she said, clasping Vivien's arm affectionately: "come along, Felix, and we four will have the landau all to ourselves. I know both the wagonettes are full."

Sybil glanced carelessly toward young Marston—presumably he was to make the fourth; she had secured the two people she wanted, namely, Vivien and Ormerod; as some one must occupy the vacant seat, he would do as well as any one. Ralph's sunburned faced flushed angrily as he turned away.

Lady Villebois saw her opportunity, and seized it eagerly.

"Oh, Mr. Atherstone," she said, coming up to him smiling, "will you take compassion on a neglected old woman? Here I am left to my own devices. Those selfish girls have gone off without troubling their foolish young heads about me. Will you drive me in the pony-phaeton, if it hasn't been 'annexed' by somebody?"

"I shall be delighted," answered Atherstone, his brow clearing as his eyes rested on the speaker's beautiful face —for it was a beautiful face still in spite of her seventy years. He gave her his arm and led her to the entrance just as the landau and its four occupants drove off. Atherstone cast one wistful glance after it, and then, shaking off his disappointment like a sensible fellow as he was, went in search of the pony-phaeton. Luckily it was not far off, and one of the men brought it round at once.

"What a piece of good luck!" thought her ladyship, as they bowled smoothly down the avenue. "I have got my man to myself for an hour at least, and he can't get away from me."

She was far too diplomatic to open the campaign at once. She had plenty to talk about; and, as she expressed it, her tongue always preferred the active to the passive mood. With her the art of conversation really was an art—an art to which the pen can never do adequate justice. The inflection of tone which lends additional piquancy to a quaint turn of thought, the bright glance which points wit, and the mobility of expression which adds a thousand-fold to the meaning of both are lost. It is the difference between a photograph and one of Vicat Cole's *chefs-d'œuvre;* both render the features of the landscape with precision, but one lacks the expression of color, of life, while the other puts before you the whole magic beauty of the scene with a vividness second only to that of nature.

Let any one who doubts the difference between written and spoken dialogue, read through "Much Ado about Nothing," and then go to the Lyceum and see Mr. Irving and Miss Ellen Terry act it.

In five minutes Lady Villebois succeeded in banishing the clouds from Atherstone's mental horizon. At first he listened to her simply out of politeness, but soon with unfeigned pleasure and interest. A woman who has lived for more than fifty years in a society that included most of the celebrities in the political, artistic, and literary worlds, who has the essentially feminine gift of observation and quick intuition, and who has a memory sufficiently retentive to garner up the precious residuum of varied information which a long experience of life leaves behind it, is a woman emphatically worth listening to. Lady Villebois, however, did not talk merely for the pleasure of talking; and, alas for the fallibility of poor human nature!—her object in making herself agreeable to Atherstone was not the praiseworthy one of consoling him under the disappointment of Miss Sybil's cavalier conduct. Her motive was simply to lead up to the subject of Atherstone's American adventures. When she thought the ground fairly well cleared for the first diplomatic skirmish, she began cautiously in the approved manner and with a perfect assumption of carelessness.

"You have been a great traveler, I believe, Mr. Atherstone?"

"Well, yes, I have traveled a few miles, though I should hardly venture to call myself a great traveler. No man can nowadays, unless he has done a walking-tour in Thibet, or explored the interior of Africa, or climbed the Andes, or performed some sensational feat of the sort."

"But I thought I heard you speak of America, Japan, and one or two places rather out of the beaten track. Why don't you write a book about your travels?"

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed the other, fervently, "I am not ambitious to add my mite to the mountain of books of travel written by amateur authors. Why, the shelves of some publishers must groan under the piles of unread volumes which cumber them!"

"Then write a novel—as a peg to hang your experiences on. Every one reads novels; they are the mental *pabulum* of social life."

"If I did, it would never attain the dignity of print," replied Atherstone, shrugging his shoulders.

"Oh, yes, it would, if you followed one or two hints which I will give you."

"Then, why not write the novel yourself?"

"I! Oh, no, my dear Mr. Atherstone, I am too old and too lazy. I prefer the *role* of critic; it is so much easier. But I don't object to play the part of literary mentor; I am ready to give you any amount of advice."

"Thank you," said Atherstone, dryly.

"I can only briefly suggest ideas; I leave it to you to develop them. You might have a hoyden heroine—that is always pleasing to a very large class of readers. At first she should be *gauche*, and not too good-looking; later she must develop into a paragon of beauty. Then your hero must be a slangy man, with a partiality for a meerschaum, and the manners of a bear. Your heroine must be discovered in the first chapter, in any extraordinary position you like, swinging on a five-barred gate, perched on a wall, or asleep in a gnarled old apple-tree. If the hero is a married man, all the better—a married-man lover is a sure card in a novelist's hand. Or, if you prefer it, go in for the pseudo-French school of sensational realism, or write a medico psychico-criminal novel, in which the hero or heroine is alternately sane and insane, guilty and innocent. What do you say to this recipe for the concoction of one of these triumphs of artistic skill? Take one mad-woman, one dark and gloomy misanthrope, one or two villains, according to taste, several cuttings from the *Police News*, and one or two excerpts from the Newgate Calendar; mix up with a light froth of love-making, stir in a short extract from the *Lancet*, and serve quickly. I think it would hit the public taste."

Atherstone laughed.

"You are rather hard on novel-writers, Lady Villebois. Remember the demand insures the supply. If books of that class were not read and admired, assuredly they would not be written."

"I sit reproved. But to return to the subject of your novel. Seriously, you might write a very good one if

you drew the plot from your own experience. For instance," she went on, firing her first volley boldly, "that story you told us yesterday at luncheon would make an excellent foundation on which to rear a superstructure of sensational incident. Jabez Rudd—that was the ex-solicitor's name, I think—of course he must be the villain of your book, or, better still, the tool of a greater villain." This was a shot fired at random, and Lady Villebois' blue eyes looked quickly and keenly at Atherstone. No change of expression passed over his face. She was at a loss to know whether the chance shot had found its billet.

"I daresay, though," she continued, carelessly, "the man's real history would form a more thrilling romance than anything you and I could evolve from our inner consciousness. Fact is ever so much stranger than fiction, and I daresay if you happened to know the true story of Jabez Rudd, and really embodied it in a novel, people would call it overdrawn and improbable."

"And yourself among the number," remarked Atherstone, dryly.

"Well hit! again I acknowledge that I sit corrected. But, seriously," she said, abruptly changing her tactics for a more direct method of attack, "I will be quite frank with you, Mr. Atherstone. I really have a reason for asking you to tell me what you know of this man Rudd."

Atherstone looked considerably astonished at this sudden change from levity to sober earnestness.

"I really have nothing of importance to tell," he replied, slowly. "At one time Rudd confided a good deal of his past history to me, but he usually confined himself to anecdotes about the men and women he had met in various places. If he did happen to talk about himself, I noticed that he was always especially cautious, and that he never mentioned names of people or of localities."

"He did not tell you then what was the reason of his enforced withdrawal from England?"

"No; but I gathered that it was not a very creditable affair. He always managed to lead the conversation away from the subject, and I naturally shrank from prying into what did not concern me."

"Then you really know nothing more about him? You have no clew whatever to his secret? That he had a secret seems certain, or he would not have been so reserved with one who befriended him in a strange land."

"Well, to tell you the truth," said Atherstone, hesitatingly, "I have some sort of clew, but I came by it under peculiar circumstances, and—in short, I do not care to repeat what I know," he added, bluntly.

"But the man is dead; he is beyond the reach of harm," urged Lady Villebois, eagerly. "Are you not a little overscrupulous, Mr. Atherstone?"

"Perhaps so; but when I tell you that I learned what little I know from Rudd's delirious ravings—"

"And when *I* tell you that by hiding what you know you may be seriously hindering the course of justice!" interrupted the other, impressively.

"Are you serious, Lady Villebois?"

He turned and looked at her with his keenest glance, but she did not flinch.

"Indeed, I am," she said, gravely; then, as if obeying a sudden inspiration, she went on quickly, "Mr. Atherstone, though you are almost a stranger to me, I am tempted to confide a very important matter to you."

Atherstone murmured something about the honor she did him, but he looked somewhat taken aback by her impulsiveness.

"Are you an old friend of Mr. Le Marchant?" she asked, abruptly.

Atherstone looked thoroughly astonished at the suddenness and seeming irrelevancy of the question.

"No; at least—"

He stopped in some embarrassment. Mr. Le Marchant had apparently forgotten all about their previous acquaintance five years ago, and Atherstone, partly because he hated any reference to his brief medical career, and partly because the matter seemed too trivial to mention, had not thought it necessary to remind him of it.

"Why do you hesitate?" inquired Lady Villebois, eagerly. "I only asked you a very simple question."

"I met Mr. Le Marchant some five years ago in Lon-

don; but, I think, on one occasion only. As he appeared to have forgotten all about me—"

"Are you sure of that?" interrupted her ladyship, suspiciously. "It strikes me that Mr. Le Marchant is not a man who would forget easily."

"Oh! I daresay he would not think it worth while to remember me," he said, with a touch of bitterness. "I was only a struggling doctor then."

"A doctor! Were you ever a doctor, Mr. Atherstone?"

"Yes, an unsuccessful one."

Lady Villebois was silent for some minutes; she was puzzling out this new phase in the mystery. It seemed that by a lucky chance she had hit on the very man she wanted. She decided on making a bold stroke.

"You say you met Mr. Le Marchant five years ago; did you ever see his uncle, the late Mr. Dallas?"

"He was my patient—that is, he was my partner's patient; I only attended Mr. Dallas once."

The color flushed all over Lady Villebois' face.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, clasping both her hands on the other's arm—a gesture that nearly resulted in a catastrophe; for, in his surprise, Atherstone dropped the reins, and the ponies, startled out of their usual self-possession, showed symptoms of bolting.

"Sit still!" he cried, authoritatively, as Lady Villebois, possessed with the essentially feminine idea that it is better to jump out of a vehicle than to be thrown out of it, was preparing to act accordingly. "You are quite safe where you are."

In less time than it takes to write it, he had the reins securely in his grasp, and the ponies, with remarkable good sense, relinquished all notion of running away when they felt his firm grip.

Lady Villebois, the danger over, felt rather ashamed of her want of presence of mind. She tried to persuade herself that surprise at what Atherstone had told her had as much to do with her discomfiture as fear for her personal safety. She returned at once to the charge.

"I want you to tell me as much as you can about Mr. Dallas," she said, bending her blue eyes with a keen

glance on the other's face. "I do not ask you to do this simply to gratify my curiosity."

Atherstone was silent, and Lady Villebois went on:

"Just now I said I was inclined to trust you with a matter of grave import. I am resolved to yield to the inclination. But first I must tell you that Miss Lowry—"

"Yes?" he said, eagerly, as Lady Villebois paused. "What has Miss Lowry to do with the matter?"

"Miss Lowry is the granddaughter of your former patient, Mr. Dallas—her mother was his only child."

"Then why—?"

"Why did she not inherit his property? Because Mr. Le Marchant tricked her out of it."

Having made her grand *coup*, her ladyship paused to watch its effect on her companion.

"That is a very serious charge to bring against him, Lady Villebois," said Ralph, knitting his brows with a troubled air.

"It is. You may be sure it is not lightly made," she answered, gravely. "I want you to help me to prove it—or disprove it."

"I—how can I help you?"

"By telling me all you can about Mr. Dallas' last illness."

Atherstone looked uncomfortable. His color rose, and his eyes grew troubled.

"I don't like talking about my former patients; it savors of meanness."

"Not in this case," said Lady Villebois, quickly and impatiently. "If you knew all the circumstances, you would think as I do—that the end justifies the means."

"Is not that rather a dangerous doctrine?"

"I don't want to discuss the question," she retorted, with added impatience. "Listen to me for five minutes, Mr. Atherstone, and I am sure you will take my view of the case."

Lady Villebois briefly narrated Catherine Dallas' story, and then went on to tell him of Vivien's early struggles, and her own suspicions about Le Marchant. Atherstone

listened in silence; but, when she had finished, he turned toward her, and said, in a low voice:

"You have placed me in a very painful position. The fact of my being Mr. Le Marchant's guest renders it doubly painful."

"It cannot be helped," she retorted, with a touch of irritation in her tone. "I am exactly in the same position myself; but, as I said just now, the end justifies the means. If my suspicions of Mr. Le Marchant are without foundation, I shall be the first to make the *amende honorable*. But, as Miss Lowry's friend, I feel it incumbent upon me to pursue this matter to the end. Will you help me, Mr. Atherstone?"

"I will think the matter over," Atherstone answered, slowly. "I must have time to consider all that promise might involve."

"You are very cautious," she remarked, with a touch of irony. "But no doubt you are right. Do not, however, keep me long in suspense. If you can, find an opportunity of speaking to me later on in the day."

Atherstone bowed his head in assent.

Lady Villebois having so far been successful in her diplomacy, allowed him to fall into a brown study, which lasted until they arrived at their destination.

CHAPTER VIII.

SIR BEVIS' OAK.

OAK HILL WOOD had several characteristics to distinguish it from other woods in the neighborhood. The low hill which rose in its center was bare of trees save on the summit, where a solitary oak reared its stately head in defiance of autumn storms and winter snows. That ancient tree, according to local tradition, had witnessed an unhallowed compact between the Evil One and a desperate wretch who had bartered away his soul for gold.

Sybil had been narrating the legend to her three companions in the landau, and they were still discussing it, with mock gravity, as they walked through the wood.

"You see," remarked Miss Le Marchant, naively, "he wanted money so dreadfully, poor man."

"Most of us do," put in Atherstone, who had joined them as soon as he saw Lady Villebois engaged in conversation with her hostess. Mrs. Le Marchant was making polite excuses about the barouche—excuses her ladyship listened to with a gleam of amusement lurking at the corners of her expressive mouth.

"But he need not have gone to such desperate lengths," said Vivien, smiling.

" 'Diseases desperate grown, by desperate appliance are relieved,' " returned Atherstone, dryly.

"All these legends are in a manner typical," said Ormerod, thoughtfully. "Have not men sold their souls for gold in all ages? Why, it is done now every day."

"Well, I don't blame Sir Bevis half so much," Sybil declared, "because he wanted the money for such a good purpose."

"What was that?" asked Atherstone, who had not heard the beginning of the story.

"Sir Bevis sold his soul to the powers of evil for a sum of money to save the girl he loved from marrying some wicked old baron—I forget his name. Her parents were very poor and the baron was very rich."

"I think we hear of parallel cases even in this immaculate nineteenth century," Atherstone remarked, parenthetically.

"Before the wedding-day," went on Sybil, ignoring the interruption, "Sir Bevis appeared with a whole retinue of followers at the castle where the parents of the fair Yolande dwelt. He was dressed magnificently, and mounted on a noble charger, and, what was more to the point, he laid a heavy bag of gold at their feet as an earnest of the sum he meant to bestow on them in exchange for their daughter's hand. Mr. Atherstone," exclaimed Sybil, breaking off abruptly, "you are smiling a smile of incredulity. Unless I see you in a more serious frame of mind, I decline to tell you the rest of the legend."

The path through the wood was somewhat narrow. Atherstone and Sybil unconsciously slackened their pace

while Ormerod and Vivien walked on side by side under the overarching trees, talking so earnestly that they seemed quite oblivious of the other two. It had at last penetrated to the mind of young Marston that he was *de trop*, and, though he cast regretful glances after Vivien's vanishing figure, he was fain to mutter some lame excuse to Miss Le Marchant, and efface himself with all speed.

Atherstone looked at his companion's bright face and smiled again.

"You misunderstand me completely, Miss Le Marchant. I confess to the smile, but I deny its incredulity. The legend of Sir Bevis and the fair Yolande is extremely interesting, and I have no doubt contains the usual germ of truth. Pray, let me hear the end of it."

Thus adjured, Sybil proceeded:

"Yolande's parents at first doubted the genuineness of Sir Bevis' wealth; but when more bags of gold were produced, and they were allowed to handle the broad shining pieces, amazement took the place of incredulity. The knight declared that not only would he give the sum promised by the baron, but that he would double it if his marriage with Yolande might be celebrated on the morrow. After a little demur, the bargain was concluded, and Sir Bevis and his bride departed to the castle the former had purchased with a portion of his ill-gotten wealth."

"Ah, money is a powerful lever," said Atherstone, with a half sigh.

"I daresay; but it can't make people happy," asserted Sybil, with the confident tone of one who has never known the want of the despised commodity.

"Perhaps not; but the lack of it sometimes makes people less happy than they might otherwise be," observed Atherstone, dryly.

"Perhaps," said Sybil, doubtfully. The contingency of possible poverty was not one she had hitherto contemplated.

"Then you don't care for great wealth, Miss Le Marchant?" asked Atherstone, looking her keenly in the face. "You could be happy with only moderate means?"

He was thinking of what might be the result of the in-

quiry Lady Villebois had set on foot; thinking of the part he might be called on to play in the drama that must be enacted shortly; thinking of the trouble that threatened to darken this fair girl's life.

"Thank God, she has Ormerod to look to for protection in the coming storm!" he thought, as he looked at her.

He was again conscious of a certain bitter disappointment that sometimes rose like a mist between him and Sybil's bright young face.

"You do not care for great wealth?" he repeated, more earnestly.

"N—o," said Sybil, hesitating slightly; "but I shouldn't like to be poor."

"Of course not. It is not a pleasant experience—though sometimes a salutary one. But, Miss Le Marchant," he added, in a lighter tone, "I have not heard what became of Sir Bevis and his bride."

"Oh," said Sybil, briskly, "the story ends tragically. Sir Bevis died within a year of his marriage, and then—"

"The terms of the compact were carried out to the letter?"

"Yes."

"And the fair Yolande—what became of her?"

"She entered a nunnery, and died a few months after her husband."

"A nunnery seems to be the favorite refuge for broken-hearted ladies of all ages, and in all ages," laughed Atherstone, as they emerged from the belt of woodland which encircled Oak Hill.

Under the brilliant, blue August sky, the hill, crowned with its legendary oak—a very Methuselah of a tree, for it had braved the blasts of four hundred winters—did not look at all a suitable place for any transactions of a diabolic nature. A light breeze rippled the "leafy tide of greenery" which laved the base of the hill. Large, fleecy-white clouds sailed across the azure breadths of sky, taking fantastic shapes as they sped on toward the sea.

Vivien and Ormerod had already climbed to the summit of the hill, and were standing together by the massive trunk of the grand old tree. During their walk

through the wood, they had been talking with something of the freedom of former days. Ormerod, having graduated in the social university, knew how to use the worldly wisdom he had learned there to the best advantage. Self-restraint is one of the best lessons taught in that mundane Alma Mater, and Ormerod resolutely set himself to talk to Vivien without betraying the change that had taken place in his feelings toward her. What Vivien lacked in *savoir-faire*, she made up for in feminine tact. She saw that he was trying to re-establish their friendship on the old footing, and she tried her best to talk naturally on the subjects that had once been of mutual interest to them.

He was full of some new plans for improving the homes of the working-classes; and there were many points on which he wished to ask her advice. Vivien's experience of the dark side of London life was infinitely greater than his own. He had a mere surface knowledge of its misery, while she had been steeped to the lips in the bitter waters of poverty. He could hardly realize that it was so, as he listened to the pure, refined tones of her voice, and mentally contrasted her simple but correct English with the slangy, slip-shod vocabulary of so many girls in society. It seemed hardly credible that this noble-looking woman, with her grand face and unconscious dignity of carriage, had once lived and worked in a mean little shop in Camberwell. He knew nothing of her story beyond the facts he had narrated to Sybil and her mother in the drawing-room at Dallas Towers three months ago, save that his betrothed had laughingly told him that Vivien was a "distant cousin of papa's." He had, however, paid little attention to this statement, thinking it highly probable that the relationship was simply a figment of Sybil's brain. He was, of course, entirely ignorant of the network of schemes Lady Villebois was weaving round Le Marchant.

Atherstone, being naturally of a reserved temperament, had not confided to him how far he was mixed up in certain past episodes in Le Marchant's life. Indeed, there had been few opportunities of private conversation be-

tween the two men since Atherstone's unexpected appearance in the neighborhood.

As they stood together under the spreading boughs of Sir Bevis' oak, a dream-like memory floated through her brain of two parallel scenes in her life. Under the broad shade of the cedar-tree on the lawn at Rollestone House she and Ormerod had first met; under the protecting shadow of the elm in Dallas Park she had lived through the bitter hour when she probed her own heart, and found what was hidden there. That momentary flash of memory filled her with a vague foreboding; she dreaded she knew not what. This half-hour's talk with Ormerod had been perilously sweet to her, but she knew that such glimpses of happiness would only make the future seem more gloomy.

"If I only could get away from the Towers!" she thought for the hundredth time. If she could get away from the Towers, it seemed to her that the worst of her troubles would be smoothed away. Her eyes were fixed dreamily on the wide landscape spread out at her feet. Ormerod was watching her with some curiosity; there was a wistful expression in her eyes he had never seen there before, the sweet serenity that characterized her seemed troubled.

"I fear I have wearied you with these plans of mine," he said, after a pause. "All this talk about the poor, their struggles and sorrows, is hardly a lively topic. Do forgive me, Miss Lowry, for casting a gloom on your first picnic."

Vivien turned at the sound of his voice, and a sudden warmth of color swept over her face.

"You have not wearied me."

She was so accustomed to speak quite frankly that, even though her heart was full of trouble and vague unrest, the old habit of perfect candor asserted itself.

"I am glad of that," said Ormerod, his face lighting up. "There are so many things I want to talk to you about," he went on, eagerly.

All his good resolutions about keeping away from Vivien had melted into thin air now that he was under the

spell of her presence. Like a man who has been long condemned to live in a dark, narrow cell where the sun never enters, he forgot everything in the joy of feeling the gracious warmth of its beams. Why should he not enjoy the present moment? Why should he not be happy for a few hours? Why should he not bask in the sunshine of her presence? By-and-by, when the dark days of winter came, it would be something to have the memory of this one day of warmth and light and happiness. He meant to marry Sybil, meant to do his best to conquer his love for Vivien; but a sudden recklessness had come over him. He wanted to be happy for one day. The cold reserve he had so carefully wrapped about him of late was thrown aside, and, when Sybil and Atherstone climbed the hill, the latter was somewhat puzzled at the sudden change in his friend's manner. There was a light in Ormerod's eyes he had never seen before, a look of almost defiant happiness in his face.

"Where are all the others?" said Sybil, glancing down the grassy slope, "we four seem to be monarchs of all we survey. I am getting hungry, aren't you, Felix? I suggested having lunch up here under Sir Bevis' oak, but mamma would not hear of it; she said it would kill her to walk up this hill, so I believe we are to eat our luncheon in a clearing down there in the wood."

"Under the shadow of Sir Bevis' oak, how can you talk of such a mundane thing as luncheon? As to the idea of eating it—why, it is simply profane," said Atherstone, laughing.

"Oh, romance is all very well in its way, but—"

"But it is a bad substitute for lobster-salad and cold chicken—to say nothing of champagne."

"I was not going to say that," retorted Sybil, "though there is some amount of truth in what you say. But," she went on, gayly, "we will devote half an hour to Sir Bevis and romance, before the prosaic business of luncheon."

"You are admiring the view, I see, Miss Lowry," said Ralph, going up to Vivien. She had not spoken since he and Sybil had made their appearance on the scene; her

eyes looked out at the distant range of hills which bounded the horizon, but there was a perceptible quiver of emotion about her expressive mouth, as though some strong feeling had lately stirred her. Since he had gleaned from Lady Villebois some events of the strange history of her girlhood, Atherstone was more interested in her than ever.

"She is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen," he thought, as he looked at her. "I am sure she has a noble nature. Curious that I should hold in my hand—"

"It is a very beautiful view," said Vivien, interrupting his musings. "Look at the shadows the clouds are making on those hills. I think I understand now what writers mean when they speak of a smiling landscape. When the clouds flit over the sky, the shadows and the sunlight seem to give expression to the hills and the woods, and they really seem to smile as the shadows pass away."

"If you think this simple English landscape so beautiful, what would you say to the magnificent distances one gets in America?"

"I might not be able to grasp their beauty, and understand and love it as I do this. In the face of all that grandeur, one must stand in wonder and awe. Why, even to read of it is a thrilling experience!"

"If you have that sort of feeling about Nature, you ought to be an artist, Miss Lowry," said Ralph.

"My father was," Vivien answered, quietly; "perhaps there are some hereditary instincts of Art latent in me. But I think most town-bred people like myself love Nature. You see, it has always been a sort of beautiful abstraction to us, something to dream about—a sort of fairy-land of perpetual sunshine and flowers. When I was a child, I used to think that it was only in towns that sorrow came; that life must be smooth always to people who lived among fields and woods."

"A romantic fallacy. There is just as much unhappiness and unrest, if there is less actual want, in the country—though the lot of a day-laborer with a wife, a dozen chil-

dren, and an income of twelve shillings a week is not exactly to be envied."

"Ah, but the poorest countryman has this advantage over a Londoner: he lives among beautiful surroundings; he breathes pure air, and he has always the wide sky to look at."

"Advantages, I fear, he has little heart to appreciate. For my part, I should stagnate in the country. Give me the fuller life of cities. Men and women are a thousandfold more interesting than trees and fields."

"Mr. Atherstone! I want to show you the exact spot where tradition says Sir Bevis made that wicked bargain," cried Sybil, in her clear, bird-like tones. "Felix will not get up the proper amount of interest in the subject."

"Now, Miss Lowry, we must take a leap backward from this matter-of-fact nineteenth century to the romantic fifteenth," laughed Atherstone, as they joined Sybil and Ormerod. The latter was looking distrait and just a little bored. "I wonder which had the harder time of it: the feudal retainer of the good old days, or the under-fed, under-paid laborer of to-day?"

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. MARSTON'S STRATAGEM.

THE picnic passed off with considerable *éclat*. The younger guests agreed that it was a complete success; the elders, if they objected to running the risk of future rheumatism by eating their luncheon on an extemporized table under the open sky instead of in a comfortable dining-room, bore it in smiling silence and congratulated Mrs. Le Marchant on the excellence of all her arrangements.

"You couldn't have chosen a prettier spot, dear Mrs. Le Marchant," said Mrs. Marston, glancing approvingly at the stretch of emerald turf zoned about with large trees which threw a pleasant shade on the open glade,

where the long table, with its dainty arrangement of fruit and flowers and delicate fare, made a pretty picture against the leafy background. A tiny brook tinkled over its pebbly bed near by, mingling its low music with the gay laughter of the girls and the popping of champagne corks. "I don't care for picnics, as a rule," she went on, with the uncompromising frankness of speech on which she prided herself, "but this is really charming."

Mrs. Marston's enjoyment was not marred, as on the previous evening, by any anxiety about her son. Mountcashel Marston was seated at some distance from Miss Lowry, between a portly matron of fifty and an inoffensive young lady with straw-colored hair and vacant blue eyes, whose conversational powers were distinctly limited.

"I am so glad the day is fine," observed Mrs. Le Marchant, arranging the knot of crimson roses at her throat; "there is generally a difficulty about the weather on these occasions," she added, as though the elements were adverse powers that had to be conciliated.

"Yes, indeed. I was once at a picnic where we had to eat our luncheon under umbrellas; and half the party were laid up with colds the next day."

"How unfortunate!"

"Pack, clouds, away, and welcome day,
With night we banish sorrow;
Sweet air blow soft; mount larks aloft,
To give my love good-morrow!
Wings from the wind to please her mind,
Notes from the lark I'll borrow;
Bird prune thy wing, nightingale sing,
To give my love good-morrow."

A burst of song came from a neighboring thicket, and stopped the hum of conversation. Mrs. Le Marchant had telegraphed to London on the previous day and secured the services of a choir of madrigal singers.

"What a pretty surprise!" "How charming!" "Quite idyllic!" chorused every one, when the quaint old ditty was concluded.

"What a happy thought," said Atherstone to Sybil.

"I am glad you think so, because I suggested it to mamma," she answered, with a blush and a smile.

The well-drilled footmen flitted in and out among the trees waiting on the guests as noiselessly and as efficiently as though the sylvan banquet were in progress in the dining-room at the Towers. Perhaps under those powdered wigs lurked a feeling of indulgent contempt for the people they served. Who knows? The parliament which sits in the servants' hall to criticise our actions and discuss our motives is no doubt severer in its verdict than we think. The lofty soul of Jeames de la Pluche must despise such frivolities as picnics, and doubtless he looks on people who indulge in such mild dissipation as stupid creatures who are foolishly contented with such a poor make-believe of festivity.

The glee-singers sang their songs under the green shade, and the birds, who had never heard such a grand concert before, twittered among the leaves, but whether they approved this invasion of their solitude and sanctioned this extraordinary usurpation of their ancient manorial rights is doubtful. They chirped inquiries to each other, and peeped down with bright black eyes at the intruders; and then one bolder than the rest fluttered down to get a better view of the proceedings. Oak Hill Wood was usually a very quiet place, and such inroads were of rare occurrence. The day of Mrs. Le Marchant's picnic was one to be marked with a white stone in the birds' calendar.

To Vivien the whole scene was new and delightful. That Arcadian repast under the summer sky, with the breeze whispering among the leaves, the low babble of the brook as it stole on to join the distant river, the bursts of music from the hidden glee-singers was like a glimpse into a brighter world. The doubts and fears of the early morning had vanished. Perhaps she enjoyed the passing moment with keener zest because of the sorrow that had preceded it. Youth soon feels the rebound, and a girl's heart is seldom dead to the bright influences of sunshine and laughter and music. It is possible that, over and above all this, Ormerod's presence at her side had some-

thing to do with the joyousness that filled her being. The coldness and reserve of his manner had vanished completely. He talked and laughed and seemed quite a different being from the silent, distrait, and somewhat gloomy Ormerod of the previous evening. Atherstone, who had always looked on his friend as a good fellow, though overmuch given to the study of blue-books and other dry political details, was quite astonished at this new phase in his character. But he put down the improvement entirely to Sybil's influence. That bright little fairy, he thought, would have power to make a stoic smile.

Poor Atherstone! his heart had soon surrendered to pretty Sybil's innocent coquetries. His love for her was very unselfish, very tender, and quite hopeless. From the first he knew that there was no chance for him. Sybil was going to marry Ormerod, and besides, what charm had a sober, almost middle-aged man with a pretty girl of eighteen? Atherstone was only thirty-three, but early acquaintance with disappointment made him look considerably older than his years.

No, he told himself, sadly but without bitterness, it would never have done. He had been a rolling stone all his life, and had gathered no moss to make a nest for pretty Sybil. Even if she had not been an heiress he would never have had a chance. Well, there was no harm in his loving her. Ormerod himself could not object to that, even if he knew—though he did not, and never would. He would love her all his life. Does not Tennyson, the poet-sage, say that it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all?

Atherstone smothered a sigh and turned to answer some trivial remark made by a young lady who sat on his left.

After luncheon the guests dispersed, some to climb the oak-crowned hill, and indulge in speculative disquisitions on the legend of Sir Bevis; some to drive to the ruins of a neighboring abbey; some—and among these were Sybil, Atherstone, and most of the young men and maidens—proposed driving over in a wagonette to pay a visit to a gypsy encampment on Crays-nest Common. All were to

reassemble at six o'clock for afternoon tea, and at dusk the carriages would start from Oak Hill Wood so as to reach the Towers in time for dinner. The day's festivities would wind up with an impromptu dance in the Gothic hall. Sybil had suggested the last item in the programme, and Mrs. Le Marchant had languidly, though reluctantly, acquiesced in the plan.

It has been said that Mrs. Marston had noted with much uneasiness how strongly her son had been attracted by Miss Lowry. At the conclusion of luncheon, when people were standing about in knots of two or three, discussing their plans for the afternoon, that worthy matron saw with deep vexation that the infatuated Mountcashel was hovering about Vivien with the evident intention of forming one of whatever party she elected to join. Mrs. Marston at once determined to circumvent the projects of her son. It was intolerable that he should presume to run contrary to her wishes: she had contrived to whisper a caution to him before luncheon, but he told her sullenly that he knew what he was about, and added that he thought Miss Lowry the finest girl he had ever seen. As her warning had failed to recall him to a sense of the fitness of things, Mrs. Marston resolved to practice an innocent little ruse in order to gain her point. Mountcashel had always been so amenable to maternal discipline that his sudden insubordination fell on her like an unexpected blow. But the remembrance of years of successful domestic government stimulated her to devise some means by which her authority should be re-established.

Vivien was moving off with the others along the path which led to the road where the wagonette awaited them. Not a moment was to be lost.

"Miss Lowry," she called, softly, "will you come to me one moment?"

Vivien turned at once, and, seeing the look of distress on Mrs. Marston's face, imagined she was suffering from sudden faintness. She was at her side in a moment.

"You are ill, I am afraid," said Vivien, gently. "Can

I do anything for you? Sit down for a moment on this bank."

"I—I do feel rather faint," stammered the other. "If you will stay with me for a few minutes, I should be very grateful," she added, seating herself on the mossy bank indicated.

Vivien produced a pretty scent-bottle that had been one of Lady Villebois' many gifts, and applied herself to the task of alleviating the sufferings of the supposed invalid. Mrs. Marston was only a novice in the art of dissimulation, and she felt some qualms of conscience as the girl's slender white fingers untied her bonnet-strings and touched her temples with eau-de-cologne.

"Do you feel better now?" asked Vivien, looking at her kindly. The clear gaze of those truthful gray eyes made the other wince slightly; but, the Rubicon of untruth once crossed, she felt it would not do to drop the *role* she had assumed just yet. Since she had stooped to dissimulation, she might just as well keep the deception up until the wagonette had started.

"If you would be so very kind as to fetch me a glass of water, I—I think I should feel quite well."

Vivien went at once in search of the required refreshment, which she procured after some delay.

"I am afraid it is not so clear as it might be," she said, apologetically; "one of the servants fetched it from the brook."

"Thank you, it will do perfectly."

Mrs. Marston took the glass mechanically; she was straining her ears for the sound of wheels on the distant road. Surely the wagonette must have started by this time!

"I am so sorry to have troubled you, Miss Lowry," she said, sipping the water to hide her confusion. Then, acting on a sudden inspiration, she added—"Will you drive with me to Clairvaulx Abbey?" Surely this act of condescension from a daughter of the Mountcashels would atone for the pardonable deception she had practiced!

"I would with pleasure," replied Vivien, in all inno-

cence, "but I promised to go with Miss Le Marchant to Crays-nest Common."

Before the other could reply, Lady Villebois, Mrs. Le Marchant, and the rector approached.

"Here is the missing member of our party!" exclaimed her ladyship, catching sight of Mrs. Marston. "Dear me, I hope you are not ill?" she added, as her quick eye noted the lady's untied bonnet-strings, the glass of water, and Vivien in attendance.

"Mrs. Marston felt faint, but is recovering," explained the latter.

"I hope you will be equal to the drive to Clairvaulx," said Mrs. Le Marchant, in a slightly aggrieved tone. It seemed to her that this sudden faintness of Mrs. Marston was an infringement of her copyright in all such interesting ailments.

"Oh, yes," said the invalid, briskly. "I am quite well again, thank you," she added, tying her bonnet-strings and rising with dignity.

"Where are you going, Vivien?" asked Lady Villebois.

"I—I hoped Miss Lowry would go with us to Clairvaulx," put in Mrs. Marston, quickly; "it is a most interesting old place."

"You will be four in the barouche without me," answered Vivien, smiling; "besides, I promised to go in the wagonette. I must hurry away, or I shall be left behind."

Mrs. Le Marchant, who had no wish to have her elegant toilet crushed by an additional occupant of her carriage, forbore to make any remark, and Lady Villebois, divining the girl's wish to escape from the uncongenial society of the two ladies, wisely kept silence.

Mrs. Marston watched Vivien's retreating figure with some misgivings. What if the wagonette should have started? What if, after all, Mountcashel had seen through her little plot, and had defeated it either by delaying the departure of the carriage, or, worse still, by staying behind himself? Who could say what might be the result of an afternoon's *tête-à-tête* with a beautiful and no doubt scheming girl? Why, Mountcashel might actually be

betrayed into proposing to her! Filled with these fears, poor Mrs. Marston was led off in the opposite direction, and was soon bowling along the road to Clairvaulx with her three companions.

Meanwhile, Vivien reached the outer verge of the wood. The road which skirted it was quite deserted. Mrs. Marston's little stratagem was so far successful. Vivien had been left behind. The wagonette was already a good mile on the way to Crays-nest Common.

She felt a momentary pang of disappointment as she looked up and down the dusty road. Not a human being was in sight. The silence and loneliness of the spot were almost oppressive. Though there were hours when it was a luxury to her to be alone, she had no desire for solitude that afternoon. Perhaps she found it easier to put aside the perplexing thoughts that had troubled her of late when she was forced to talk and laugh with other people. The bright influence of fresh air, sunshine, and music, combined with the exhilarating effect of scenes which had all the charm of novelty, had done a great deal to dispel the sadness that hung on her earlier in the day; though she knew that the brightness would be brief, that the dark clouds, which covered her mental horizon to the zenith yesterday, would return to-morrow.

She had been happy for a few hours, without thought of the sad realities of her lot. But now, as she stood on the verge of the wood, and looked out at the sunlit world, a feeling almost of desolation stole over her. She seemed abandoned by every living creature, as utterly alone as though she stood on some desert island and watched the waves beat on the shore.

There are moments when the mind rebels at its bondage to the physical body; moments when its yearning for freedom from the trammels of the flesh becomes almost intolerable. The divine something within us cries out for a higher life beyond the voices of this earth. Away up there in the immeasurable spaces of the universe the freed spirit could solve the mysteries which perplex us here; the wide realms of Infinitude are there, but the golden gates which shut it in from mortal eyes cannot be

passed. Death, the keeper of the gate, holds the key, and turns a deaf ear to the cry of the imprisoned spirit. "The hour is not yet, O mortal! live thy earthly life in patience and in hope."

Vivien shivered slightly, though the air was warm, as she turned and re-entered the wood. The dreaminess that was rather the result of her strange childhood than of temperament, and which her life with Lady Villebois had lessened, stole over her as she sauntered slowly down the woodland path. The bright pictures her fancy had limned in the days when she dreamed away the long summer evenings in the little back-shop in Camberwell, flitted again across her mental visions. But a change had come over the spirit of her dream. Then, her soul-wanderings had always been solitary, now a second person invariably figured in them. When in imagination she roamed through the gorgeous splendors of a South American forest, or listened to the soft lapping of the sea on some magic shore without a name, or watched the planets burn steadfastly in the purple sky as the ship plowed its way across the wide ocean, there was always some one by her side—some one who understood her unspoken thoughts—a shadowy figure whose face was veiled, but who was not a stranger to her . . . .

The babble of the brook caught her ear, and she turned mechanically in the direction whence the pleasant sound came. The sense of loneliness that had oppressed her a moment since was gone. She was happy as in the former days when the vagrant fancies of her brain were the only brightnesses of her life. She reached the margin of the brook, and stood idly watching the clear water bubbling noisily over the brown stones. The moss-covered roots of a nodding beech-tree offered a tempting seat. She sat down and took off her hat to let the soft air touch her forehead. As she looked down at the murmuring water, and then up at the overarching branches through which the sun's rays could not penetrate, she felt glad that she was there instead of with the noisy party in the wagonette. Solitude—the old friend she had slighted in her thoughts—resumed its sway over her; its kindly arms

wrapped her in a close embrace, touching her forehead with its soothing mother-hand, and lulling her with the silence that is sometimes sweeter than music. The drowsy stillness of afternoon settled down on Oak Hill Wood; the warm breeze seemed infected with the general languor, and was too indolent to stir the water-plants which fringed the brook—the chattering, babbling brook that was the only active, restless element in that quiet scene. The mossy turf which clothed its margin made so soft a carpet to the feet that Vivien did not hear the footsteps approaching toward her retreat. The whole afternoon was not to be spent in lotos-eating. With those nearing footsteps was coming the crisis of her life.

CHAPTER X.

"I ONLY CAN LEAVE THEE."

ORMEROD'S reckless determination to be happy, if only for the space of one summer day—even if the happiness he grasped at was in its essence feverish and unreal—was so at variance with the natural reasonableness and equal balance of his mind that it soon fell from him. He saw his folly in its true light: he resolved to revert to his original position, and avoid Vivien for the rest of the day. As the easiest way to achieve this, immediately after luncheon he contrived to evade Sybil's eye and get away by himself to smoke a meditative cigar in a retired part of the wood. Sybil, with the pretty, lecturing air she sometimes assumed, had informed him that he was to drive to Crays-nest Common in the wagonette. Now Ormerod knew that, if he did this, he would again be thrown with Vivien, so he made up his mind not to emerge from his quiet covert until the wagonette had started.

He was full of gloomy thoughts as he sat on the trunk of the felled tree in the secluded dell he had lighted on. Could Atherstone have seen his friend then, he would have been puzzled to recognize this gloomy-looking man

with the frowning brows and compressed lips as the almost aggressively light-hearted Ormerod of an hour ago. He sat there smoking moodily until he thought all Mrs. Le Marchant's guests had dispersed, and then he rose and strolled on at random, without heeding where he went, thinking bitterly of many things. The day's happiness he had thirsted for had dwindled down to an hour or two of forced gayety, and already the inevitable reaction had set in.

It seemed to him that his whole life had been a failure; that his ambitious yearnings would never take any tangible shape; that the future had nothing in store for him but new disappointments, fresh trials, and constantly-recurring vexations. The goal of all his hopes—Parliamentary distinction—seemed to recede further and further from his vision. He began to doubt whether, after all, he was really fitted for his chosen career; whether the long struggle which lay before him would avail him anything; whether, even if success came ultimately, it would be worth the struggle.

Such moments of doubt come even to the constitutionally hopeful. The path which stretches out before us, the difficult, thorn-strewn path our tired feet must tread before the thing we covet can be ours stretches out in a dreary vista, and we begin to look backward instead of forward, to recall bygone struggles and failures and sorrows, instead of buckling on our armor and bracing our limbs for new struggles.

Ormerod had rarely been troubled with these hours of discouragement. Perhaps he had been a trifle over-confident of success, a trifle too satisfied with himself and his abilities. Since he had known Vivien Lowry, and, above all, since he knew that he loved her, he had begun to distrust his power of rising to the high level he had once felt so sure of attaining.

And then the thought crossed his mind how different life would look to him had things been otherwise than as they were. If Vivien had crossed his path a year ago, before he had pledged himself to Sybil, she might have learned to care for him—and then what glorious possi-

bilities opened out before him! With Vivien by his side, everything would seem easy; weariness of spirit would flee away before the light of her presence; her voice would cheer him, her sympathy console him when discouragement or disappointment came.

All his fine theories about the sweet, clinging, child-like creature who was to be raised on a pedestal and worshiped as his ideal woman, had been swept away into nothingness. He wanted a woman who would be the complement of his own individuality. The mental qualities which he lacked—perception, enthusiasm, quick sympathy—Vivien possessed; while his practical common-sense and vigorous will would reduce to definite shape, and carry out, her noble but somewhat vague dreams of helping others. Plato's fanciful theory that souls are created in pairs and go seeking each other through the world, flitted across his brain as he walked aimlessly through the wood, crushing the soft moss as he went.

"I wonder how often twin-souls find each other, and, if they do, what the chances are that circumstances will not thrust them apart again," he thought, bitterly, as he approached the stream toward which he had been unconsciously wending.

His eyes were fixed on the ground, or he would have caught sight of a white gown on the opposite bank. It was not until he reached the margin of the brook that he lifted them.

"Vivien!" he said aloud, in his surprise. He had thought her miles away at Crays-nest Common. In a moment he had leaped the narrow thread of silver water that separated them. The brook was not the only barrier that was passed as he went quickly forward. Vivien had risen; her face was pale, and she was trembling visibly.

"I have startled you," he said, in a voice that sounded almost harsh.

She made no answer; the tumultuous throbbing of her heart frightened her. She would have given the world to have turned and fled the spot, but flight was not to be thought of. With the best assumption of self-possession

she could command, she forced herself to look up and meet his eyes. They rested on her with a look she failed to fathom; his lips were set firmly, there was something in his aspect that frightened her, mastered her. She who was usually so calm, so sweetly serene and unruffled, who usually impressed people as a queen-like woman, a grand-looking creature who seemed to stand apart from the rest of her sex not only because of her great beauty, but because of the purity and dignity that crowned her with the crown of a perfect womanhood—she, Vivien Lowry, who had a moment since looked like some enchanted Dryad sitting there under the beech-tree, waiting for the wand of Life and Love to waken her to a fuller existence, stood there trembling under the glance of the man who loved her—trembling, but awakened.

"Vivien!"

He stretched out his hands to her, and without a shadow of doubt or hesitation she gave both hers to his clasp. All tremors of fear left her. Everything faded from her mind but the central fact that the crowning moment of her life had come. Both had utterly forgotten the obstacles that had kept them apart until then. They stood there by the brook-side like two spirits who have crossed the River of Death, and meet face to face on the further shore, understanding each other without the necessity of speech. There are such moments—moments when the shadows clear away, and souls are freed from the "muddy vesture of decay" which hampers and hinders the spirit it clothes; moments when thought springs out, not in articulate words, but in an electric flash that conveys it better—it is not the language of lips or eyes, it is simply the rushing together of two minds in exact accord one with the other. In the Silent Land will not that be the speech of souls?

Vivien and Ormerod stood with clasped hands. The veil of silence that had separated them was rent in twain: each knew the secret of the other's heart. The world might roll on; they were heedless of it, they had forgotten that other human beings lived. They had found each other. Like the first man and woman who stood

on the earth, that through long ages had been slowly ripening toward the consummation of Humanity, they met and knew they were created for each other. Either existence without the other would be incomplete, stunted, colorless. Together they could fight life's hardest battles; together they could endure all the trials and wearinesses to which flesh is heir. Vivien's face was transfigured—flooded with a light that was the outward manifestation of the sacred flame of joy which glowed in her heart.

Ormerod looked at her reverently, humbly. He was no longer the resolute, masterful Ormerod of a moment since. He gazed on her with wondering, adoring eyes—as Pygmalion must have watched the soul waken in the marble to which his love had given life. What was he that he should have power to work this miracle?

He felt the reverence felt by all true men when the priceless pearl of a pure woman's love is given into their keeping—that gift so sacred, so wonderful, that its bestowal must surely ennoble the basest, that rewards, as nothing else in this world can, the man who is worthy to receive it. Whatever the future had in store for Ormerod, that moment would always be remembered as the most solemn, the most sacred experience of his life.

Such moments are rare. To some of us they never come. To some they would be impossible. At best they are brief. The earth-mists rise and cloud their radiance. The sacred altar-flame dies down, and the votary turns away and goes back to the dull realities of life, with only a memory of what has been to shrine in his heart.

Ormerod's eyes were still fixed on Vivien's face. He had watched the light of perfect joy kindle in her eyes, illumine her brow; watched the sacrificial flame rise to heaven; now he saw the light die out, saw the flame sink lower—expire.

"Sybil."

Her lips breathed forth the word, and the spell which held them both was broken. The light faded from her eyes, the color from her cheeks; her hands turned cold in his. She tried to withdraw them from his clasp, but he held them fast.

"You must go away—you must leave me—you must forget that—"

"What!" he interrupted, in a smothered voice. "Forget that I love you? Forget that you love me?"

Her lips moved, but no sound came.

"Vivien, I have found you. I will not let you go. You are mine by right of our love."

"No, no. We must never see each other again. We have been mad—wicked. I have been untrue to my friend—you to your betrothed—your future wife."

"I will have no wife but you, Vivien. Listen to me. Months ago—before I had seen you—I asked Sybil to marry me; not because I loved her—how could I love her, I did not know what love was then? I asked her to marry me because she seemed a gentle-hearted, lovable girl; because I thought she cared for me a little."

"And she does care for you—not a little, but a great deal. You would not break faith with her now—now that the very day of your wedding is fixed? Oh! when I think of the shameful part I have played, I—"

She snatched her hands from his grasp, and hid her face in a sudden agony of shame. Her breast heaved with a smothered sob; her limbs trembled; a sudden weakness overwhelmed her. She sank down on the tree-root, her face still hidden in her hands.

"Vivien, my love, you must hear me—you shall hear me," said Felix, kneeling down by her. "See, I don't even take your hand," he added, as she shrunk away from him. "I only ask you to listen to me."

"Every word is a disloyalty to Sybil."

"Sybil is too proud to accept as a husband a man who loves another woman. I will tell her everything. I will throw myself on her mercy. Is not that better than ruining the happiness of three people? Yes, of three; for you love me, Vivien. You cannot be happy without me; you are mine, for your heart is mine," he said, passionately.

"But my conscience is not yours," she replied, looking at him with her steadfast eyes.

She was pale as death, but quite resolute. Ormerod's

heart sank as he looked at her. Was it possible that she would hold out against him—now?

"Vivien, be reasonable. Don't let any foolish, quixotic scruples stand between us. Don't condemn me to a life of emptiness, of weariness, of disgust."

"You will learn to love Sybil; you must forget me. Blot the remembrance of this afternoon from your mind."

"When I forget what the sunshine is like, I shall forget it—and not till then! Do you think a man can ever forget his one glimpse of Paradise? No, Vivien, you may send me away from you, but you can never make me forget you. I love you now and always; I love you, and only you."

His voice thrilled every fiber of her being. Does a woman ever listen quite unmoved to those three words, "I love you," spoken truthfully by a man, even when the love has no echo in her heart? But when they fall on her ear for the first time, and from the lips of the man she loves, can they ever be forgotten? I trow not.

Though she struggled against it, the tide of joy was bearing her away. Duty seemed so cold, so harsh beside love. Her quick brain pictured what life would be with Ormerod; the perfect companionship, the oneness of heart that would make it so fair a thing in spite of the days dark and dreary which come to all. He, the man, must of necessity bear the brunt of the world's battle—to her, the wife, would belong the sweet privilege of making his home the shrine of peace and brightness that a home should be.

Ormerod seemed to divine what was passing in her mind. His eyes dwelt on her face with a yearning that was harder to withstand than his words.

"Vivien," he went on, vehemently, "you cannot really love me, or you would make this sacrifice for my sake. You think more of Sybil's happiness than of mine."

She made no answer; she dared not trust herself to speak. Love was pleading in her heart for him. The subtlest temptation of all assailed her. Would it not be right to do wrong that good might come? Would not

Sybil's sorrow be light compared with the suffering she was inflicting on Felix?

"You will never see me again, you say. We are to part and never see each other again. Do you know what that means for me?" he went on, with new fervency, as he read signs of wavering in her face. "It means life without what makes life worth having, life without sympathy, without happiness, without love."

"Oh, you are cruel!" she whispered, in a tone of anguish that pierced his heart. "Do you think it costs me nothing to send you from me?"

"You love me!" he cried, exultingly, with a flash of triumph in his eyes; "I know it: I feel it. But let me hear you say it, Vivien. Say, 'I love you, Felix.' You will not wish to send me from you if the words are true."

"I love you, Felix," she answered, looking at him fearlessly, "too much to wish you to do a dishonorable thing."

She had conquered at last. The subtle temptation fled away; courage came back to her heart, strength to her limbs. She rose, and stood erect and tall before him.

"I love you, Felix," she repeated, in her clear, thrilling tones, "but I must leave you—now, at once. I will not filch my friend's lover from her. I will not do what is wrong even for your sake. Some day you will think as I think. There is only one word to be said now—good-by."

He sprang to his feet and stretched out his arms to her.

"You do not *mean* it, Vivien! You are not going to leave me like this!" He longed to clasp her in his arms and hold her fast, but something in her aspect forbade it. He dared not sully the maiden purity that seemed to encircle her with a sort of divinity. Brunhilde's girdle of fire was not more awe-inspiring than that impalpable something which made Vivien sacred in the eyes of her lover. He stood gazing at her as if he would satisfy his heart's hunger by that long, yearning look. Could it be true that she really meant to leave him? No: she would relent; she would come to him and place her hand in his, and promise that nothing should part them.

But, while the thought was still in his mind, she turned

away, and in a moment the trees hid her from view. She was gone.

"Vivien!"

His voice reached her through the thick screen of leaves (for days after it seemed to ring in her ears), but she only clasped her hands tighter together, and hurried on with eyes so blinded by tears that she stumbled more than once over the roots of trees; hurried on with a heart torn by an anguish so keen that death itself could surely have no bitterer pang—one desperate thought only in her brain, to get away from the voice of the never-resting brook, away from the man who loved her.

CHAPTER XI.

FURTHER REVELATIONS.

DURING the drive to and from Clairvaulx Abbey, Lady Villebois had plenty of time to think over all that she had elicited from Ralph Atherstone that morning. She was greatly disappointed that no other opportunity of conversation with him had arisen during the day. She longed to forge together the scattered links of evidence she already had in her possession.

Atherstone was the only person who could supply the missing links, and weld the whole into the strong chain which she meant to rivet round the master of Dallas Towers. She felt restless and impatient all day. It was so provoking to see the man who held the key of the mystery talking with Sybil, and to know that she was powerless to win him from the little witch's side. She resolved that before the day was over she would wring from him all he knew about Le Marchant. If every other maneuver failed, she would secure him as her charioteer for the drive home. He could not well refuse her. Mrs. Le Marchant would no doubt press her to occupy that much-coveted seat of honor in the barouche; but, she argued, if she had succeeded in baffling that lady once, why should she not gather confidence from a former victory, and baffle her again?

Lady Villebois was a woman of infinite resource and indomitable will. When she made up her mind to do a thing, she rarely failed to carry her point, whatever the difficulties in the way. Having decided that she would repeat the stratagem she had successfully accomplished earlier in the day, she patiently waited her opportunity. When it came, she seized it promptly.

When all Mrs. Le Marchant's guests reassembled, and the gypsy-tea was in full swing, her ladyship's quick eye alighted on Atherstone, who was handing cups of tea about while Sybil tended the blazing fire of fagots with the assiduity of a vestal virgin watching the sacred flame. Ralph felt Lady Villebois' eye upon him, and, attributing the glance to a desire for tea, went quickly up and offered her a cup.

"Thanks," she said, taking the tea with her brightest smile; then added, quickly, "You will drive me home, Mr. Atherstone? Remember your promise. I have not forgotten it, if you have. You have neglected me shamefully all day."

Atherstone's brow clouded. Why would not this charming old lady leave him alone? He did not wish to injure Le Marchant in any way, and yet how was he to avoid her insistence?

"My dear Lady Villebois, I beg a thousand pardons—"

"I want no apologies, I want reform. Drive me home, and all your sins of omission and commission shall be canceled—so far as I am concerned, at least."

"I shall be delighted."

But, truth to say, he was far from delighted. He would have given anything to avoid the coming *tete-à-tete* with Lady Villebois. He had mightily enjoyed the drive to Crays-nest Common in Sybil's society. He wanted to forget all disagreeable memories of the past, and, more than all, he wanted to enjoy his fool's paradise a little longer. Sybil had shown herself wonderfully gracious to him all day, and he was, consequently, eager to gather up all the happiness he could while this sweet mood of hers lasted. Lady Villebois' request quite dissipated any pleasing visions about the possibility of driv-

ing home with Sybil. However, he accepted the inevitable philosophically, and, when the carriage drove up, he handed her ladyship into the pony-phaeton, and seated himself by her side without allowing a trace of his disappointment to appear, for which manifestation of good-breeding he received a silent tribute of praise from Lady Villebois.

"And now, Mr. Atherstone," she began, in a business-like tone, "have you come to a decision in this matter?"

Now Atherstone, instead of pondering this disagreeable subject, had put it resolutely from his thoughts all day, and given himself up without reserve to the pleasure of the hour. Consequently, he looked somewhat disconcerted at his companion's direct question.

"It is a matter that requires a great deal of thinking over," he said, slowly.

"Why should it? I only ask you to tell me the simple truth."

"I don't know what use you may make of it. I am unwilling to act against Mr. Le Marchant in any way."

"I thought I had argued out that point with you this morning," she retorted, with some irritation. "I cannot understand your wish to shield this man."

Atherstone's face flushed. He was silent for a moment.

"I am his guest," he said, at last.

"So am I—I said so this morning. But that fact is not strong enough in itself to make me alter my determination to see justice done to Miss Lowry."

"You have placed me in a most awkward position, Lady Villebois."

"Not at all. My suspicions may be quite unfounded. It remains for you to prove or disprove them. But don't make me go over the old ground. I fancied I had convinced you this morning that what I have to do is a painful necessity—*but* a necessity. No doubt," she went on, in her most incisive tones, "your refusal to help me will only be a temporary stumbling-block in my way. I am resolved to go to the bottom of this matter, and opposition only strengthens my resolve. If you will not help me,

others will. I hoped to limit my inquiries, and avoid publicity—for the present, at least; but—"

"But I have not refused yet," interrputed Atherstone, quietly. "Meanwhile, am I to understand that, if I do refuse, you will place this affair in the hands of detectives?"

"Certainly. I shall leave no stone unturned in that case, and a certain amount of publicity will be inevitable. My solicitors, of course, know something, though not much—for instance, they have made extracts for me from Mr. Dallas' will."

"Why, surely, then, you have the strongest proof that Le Marchant's title to Dallas Towers is indisputable!"

"I have my own theory on the subject. I hold that Mr. Dallas made a later will than that under which Mr. Le Marchant succeeded to the estate."

Atherstone uttered an exclamation under his breath, and even in the gathering dusk his companion saw that he turned pale.

"The will proved by him after Mr. Dallas' death," proceeded her ladyship, calmly, "bears the date of November 17th, 1858—a time when the irritation against his daughter was at its height—"

"Wait a minute, Lady Villebois," interrupted the other, quickly; "give me time to realize this statement of yours. You say positively that Mr. Le Marchant inherits Dallas Towers under a will dated as far back as the year 1858?"

"Exactly."

"You have positive proof of this?"

"Positive proof!" she repeated, triumphantly, "and supported, moreover, by documentary evidence which I can show you on our return to the Towers—the extracts from the said will."

"Then," said Atherstone, gravely, "there is but one course open to me."

"And that is—?"

"To tell all I know without reservation." He paused, and looked his companion sadly in the face. "Though it will be harder than you think to do so."

"I think I understand," said Lady Villebois, gently;

"nothing but my affection for Miss Lowry and my determination to see her righted would have induced me to put so much pressure on you."

She guessed why Atherstone shrunk from injuring Mr. Le Marchant. Sybil's girlish figure stood between them, and he knew that a blow dealt at the master of the Towers must also strike his daughter.

"There is no help for it, I suppose," said he, slowly; "after all, right is right."

"Of course it is," retorted her ladyship, briskly; "and now, Mr. Atherstone, pray have some consideration for an impatient woman. Tell me what you know."

"Mr. Dallas did make another will—and I witnessed it!" He spoke quickly—almost roughly—Lady Villebois, however, was too elated to heed that. But her feeling of elation soon changed to one of wonder.

"Then you knew all the time that Mr. Le Marchant—"

"Pardon me, Lady Villebois," he said, stiffly, "I witnessed Mr. Dallas' will, but I had and have no idea of its contents. I naturally concluded that Mr. Le Marchant inherited under the will I witnessed."

"I spoke hastily. I beg your pardon," said she, frankly. "You have no idea what became of that will?"

"Not the slightest."

"It must be found, if it is in existence. Further inquiries must be made at once. Surely it will be possible to discover the solicitor who drew up the document."

"That I do not know."

"My solicitors shall have my instructions to-morrow. Meanwhile," she added, turning her keen eyes again on Atherstone's face, "you have not told me any particulars, and details may be more important than either of us think."

"I told you this morning that I attended Mr. Dallas on a single occasion only. It was during the absence of my partner, Dr. Fletcher, who had been sent for by a patient who lived at some distance from town. At that time Mr. Dallas was in a very weak state of health, though he was not seriously ill—"

"He was, of course, in full possession of his faculties?"

"Quite."

"You could certify that, if it were necessary?"

"Yes."

"Pray go on, Mr. Atherstone," said Lady Villebois, after a pause, during which many thoughts glanced quickly through her brain. "I am all attention."

"I really have very little to tell," answered the other, with an impatient sigh which seemed to express that the speaker heartily wished he had nothing at all to reveal. "The facts are simply these: I paid Mr. Dallas a professional visit at his house in Brook Street; he asked me to witness his signature; and I consented."

"There was, I suppose, a second witness?"

"Yes, Mr. Dallas' valet."

"And did you see Mr. Le Marchant that day?"

"For a few minutes only."

"After the will was signed?"

"Yes. He came into Mr. Dallas' room."

"And it did not strike you that Mr. Dallas was afraid to let his nephew know that he had made his will?"

"I had no positive proof that Le Marchant was unaware of the matter."

"But surely, Mr. Atherstone, you might have made inquiries after Mr. Dallas' death," said Lady Villebois, sharply.

"I left England within a fortnight of the day the will was signed. I did not hear of Mr. Dallas' death until a few weeks ago. Indeed, the whole affair had almost faded from my mind."

Lady Villebois remained silent and thoughtful for a few minutes. Twilight had deepened almost into night, and the stars began to show in the serene sky. It was too dark for Atherstone to see his companion's face clearly. He waited quietly until she should see fit to address him again. He felt that he stood considerably lower in her esteem since the morning; that she thought him guilty of unpardonable negligence in this matter. A sort of half-sullen, half-angry pride kept him silent. His conscience was clear; he would make no excuses for the line of conduct he had chosen to take.

"I shall go up to town to-morrow," said her ladyship at length. "After what you have told me, it will be impossible to remain at Dallas Towers longer. I suspect Mr. Le Marchant of suppressing his uncle's will."

"He may even now be ignorant that this later will exists," ventured Atherstone, quickly.

"I think not. At Mr. Dallas' death, all his papers probably passed through Mr. Le Marchant's hands. If he destroyed the will, you at least can prove that it was really made and signed. I believe that would invalidate the first will. But of this I cannot be sure. I must have counsel's opinion on the point. Now, Mr. Atherstone, I am going to ask you a few questions on another matter. We were talking this morning about the man you met in Denver City—Jabez Rudd."

Atherstone started, and turned to look at his companion's face. But again the dusk served as a veil. He could only see the dim outline of her features against the dark background of sky.

"What has poor Rudd to do with this affair?" he asked, carelessly.

"A great deal, perhaps. Did you notice Mr. Le Marchant's face when you told the story of Rudd's death yesterday at luncheon?"

"No."

"I did. And if I know anything of the human countenance Mr. Le Marchant's face expressed an absorbing interest in what you were saying, and an overpowering relief when you spoke of Rudd's death. Now, I have a theory of my own regarding the cause of this interest and this relief. I believe that the poor outcast of Denver City knew a good deal about Mr. Le Marchant's misdoings."

"And your only ground for this theory is that Mr. Le Marchant changed countenance at the mention of Rudd's name?"

"Yes."

"Then I think it does not stand on a very strong basis," said Atherstone, slowly.

"At any rate, I mean to hunt up all the information I can about Rudd," retorted her ladyship, a trifle defiantly.

"You told me that he was compelled to withdraw from England on account of some discreditable transaction. It is possible that Mr. Le Marchant may be implicated in it."

"I wish that you had obtained your information from any one but myself, Lady Villebois," burst out Ralph, irritably. "It is most painful to me to act in any way against Mr. Le Marchant."

"No doubt," remarked the other, dryly. "But, Mr. Atherstone, you must see that I had no choice but to act as I have done. Miss Lowry has been cheated out of her property; for I have little doubt that the will you witnessed would have placed her in her rightful position as mistress of Dallas Towers. Her life has been one of struggle and hardship, while Mr. Le Marchant has lived in luxury on her fortune. Really, I think your sympathy for him is misplaced."

Atherstone smiled rather grimly.

"My sympathy for Le Marchant is by no means an enthusiastic sentiment," he said, slowly; "but for his daughter I have the greatest admiration—and—"

"I understand. I am not quite blind, Mr. Atherstone," interrupted her ladyship, quickly. "I am heartily sorry that it is so."

"Another victim to that little witch's wiles," she added, mentally; "what there is in the girl to turn a man's head, I fail to see. First Felix Ormerod—and now his friend. What will be the end of it, I wonder?"

CHAPTER XII.

THE STORM BURSTS.

THE pony-phaeton swept up to the entrance of the Towers, and its two occupants alighted. On the threshold Sybil met them with a pale, agitated face, and asked breathlessly if they had seen Miss Lowry.

"I don't understand," said Lady Villebois, bewildered; "did she not return with you in the landau?"

"No; I could not find her anywhere when we left—so

I thought she had gone on in one of the other carriages. But no one has seen her."

"Can she have been left behind?" exclaimed her ladyship, in alarm.

"I will send back one of the carriages at once. Mr. Atherstone, you will go, I am sure, and Felix. I would go, too, but—"

"There is no need for that," said Ormerod, coming forward quickly. "Atherstone and I will take the dog-cart. We had better start at once."

Lady Villebois noticed that Ormerod was pale, and that his face looked worn and haggard: she jumped to the conclusion that he was seriously alarmed on Vivien's account. As a natural consequence, her own fears grew. It was not a pleasant thing to think of Vivien alone at nightfall in the solitude of Oak Hill Wood.

"Oh, yes—pray go at once, Mr. Ormerod," she said, in an agitated voice; "every moment is of consequence."

Meanwhile, the news that Miss Lowry was missing had got about among the guests; but, as most of them agreed with Mrs. Marston in classing her as a "nobody," they did not think it necessary to exhibit any great amount of concern or alarm. Young Marston, indeed, mustered up courage to volunteer to make a third in the dog-cart; but Ormerod coolly informed him that Miss Lowry would, he hoped, occupy the third seat on their return home, and in that case there would be no room for him.

Le Marchant went up to Lady Villebois directly he heard of her uneasiness on Vivien's behalf, and assured her that Oak Hill Wood was as quiet as a church, and that the young lady would be as safe there as in his own park; that the fastest horse in his stables should be put between the shafts of the dog-cart, and that in all probability Miss Lowry would be back at the Towers within an hour or two.

"I hope so," answered her ladyship, tartly.

Something in Mr. Le Marchant's manner irritated her. She longed to tell him that she knew of his past treachery; but wiser counsels prevailed. It would be better not to sound the war-trumpet just yet. Vivien must be

informed of the state of affairs before active hostilities commenced, and, all things considered, it would be more prudent, and in much better taste, to defer all further proceedings until they left Dallas Towers.

Following these wiser counsels, Lady Villebois managed to restrain her indignation against her host enough to talk to him civilly until the dog-cart drew up at the entrance. A mettlesome little black mare, looking equal to any demands upon her speed, was between the shafts. Felix sprang up on the box and took the reins; Atherstone followed, and in a moment the gig-lamps were flashing like a couple of gigantic glow-worms along the dark vista of the drive. Lady Villebois watched them until the darkness swallowed them up, and then went up to her own room to wait for Vivien's return, and to think quietly over the strange events of the day.

She had dismissed her maid, and was resting on the sofa in her dressing-room, when a low knock sounded on the door.

"Come in," said her ladyship, sharply. She was nervous, anxious, and a trifle cross, and she had a suspicion that the intruder was Mrs. Le Marchant. But she was wrong; it was Sybil.

"Oh! Lady Villebois, here is a telegram for you; a man has just ridden up from the station with it. Excuse me for disturbing you, but I thought it might be about Vivien—and—"

She was pale to the lips, and looked very frightened; her hand shook visibly as she held out the telegram. Lady Villebois tore open the buff envelope, and ran her eyes quickly over its contents. A puzzled expression crossed her face as she read.

"Is it about Vivien?" asked Sybil, breathlessly.

"Yes."

"Is she safe?"

"Yes."

"Where is she? What has happened?" breathed the girl, dropping on her knees by the sofa.

"She is in London. Nothing of any great consequence

has happened, I believe," was the curt reply. Lady Villebois did not like Sybil, and her presence irritated her.

"Don't be angry with me," said Sybil, humbly; "I daresay my questions seem stupid, but—"

"My dear Miss Le Marchant, I am not angry. It is very natural that you should wish to hear of your friend. I can only tell you this much, that Miss Lowry is quite safe; that she is in London—with the friends she lived with before she came to live with me. I do not understand why she has taken this sudden step, but I have no doubt she has excellent reasons for her conduct. I shall go up to town myself, by the first train to-morrow morning," she finished, decisively.

"But I can't understand it!" cried Sybil. "How did she get to the station? She promised to drive with us to Crays-nest Common, but when the carriage had started I found she had been left behind."

"It is useless to indulge in any surmises," said Lady Villebois, impatiently cutting short Sybil's incoherent remarks. "I suppose Vivien walked to the nearest station, and took the train to town."

"But the nearest station to Oak Hill Wood is five miles off at least," said Sybil, opening her large brown eyes in wonder.

"I daresay Vivien is equal to a walk even of five miles," answered the other, shortly.

"What can have been her reason for leaving us like that?" mused Sybil, knitting her dark brows with a charming air of perplexity.

"I have said I can offer no explanation of her conduct," rejoined her ladyship, on whom pretty Sybil's *minauderies* were in the last degree exasperating. "If you will kindly make my excuses to your mother, and say that I do not feel well enough to come down to dinner," she went on, rising and ringing the bell, "I should be extremely obliged to you."

"Can I do anything for you—get you anything?" said Sybil, eagerly. The poor child was really sorry for the brave old lady, who was too proud to show the pain Vivien's extraordinary conduct had given her. Sybil was

determined not to be rebuffed by the coldness and acerbity of her manner. "Do let me sit with you—I don't want any dinner—and I don't care for the dance—now."

"Why, dear child; this is all nonsense," answered her ladyship, smiling in spite of herself. "The only way in which you can help me is to go down, and tell every one that Miss Lowry has been called to town on business; make her excuses as well as my own to your mother—and enjoy your dance just as if nothing had happened. Indeed, I would rather be alone," she added, as Sybil still seemed indisposed to leave her. "You are a kind little girl, Sybil; forgive me if I spoke harshly just now."

And she bent down and kissed the small, anxious face, whose child-like prettiness no longer angered her.

"Perhaps I have been unjust to her, after all," mused her ladyship, when Sybil had departed. "She may be capable of stronger feelings than I thought. She seems genuinely attached to Vivien."

And then she fell to wondering what was the motive that had prompted Vivien to take so strange a step as this sudden journey to town. Could she have heard anything of what had passed that day between herself and Atherstone; and on the impulse of the moment decided that it would be impossible, under the circumstances, for her to remain at Dallas Towers? The true solution of the mystery never occurred to her. For once her sagacity was at fault. That Vivien seriously meant to take up the thread of her old life in the bookseller's shop at Camberwell, she could not believe. It was too wild a piece of quixotism! After accustoming herself to the refinements of Rollestone House, it would surely be impossible for her to return for any length of time to the mean surroundings and weary drudgery of her former lot.

No: Lady Villebois had little fear of losing her *protégée*. Vivien had for some reason or other resolved to quit the neighborhood of Dallas Towers, and her old home with the people who had befriended her in her early struggles seemed the fittest place of refuge for the moment. Lady Villebois took up the telegram, and read it through again. The brief sentence did not carry much consolation with

it, and she began to wish for the morrow, when she would see Vivien again. Her heart yearned toward the girl who had filled a daughter's place in her home for nearly a year. It troubled her to picture Vivien standing, as when she first saw her, in the murky gloom of Mr. Muffle's back-shop, with the long lines of dusty, worm-eaten volumes ranged on its smoke-begrimed walls. How well she remembered that day! The tall, nobly-molded form in the straight gown of black stuff; the wonderful beauty of her face; the air of innate refinement that was all the more striking because it seemed so at variance with her surroundings. What a picture she made against the Rembrandt-like background of brown shadow, with a single ray of light slanting from a chink in the shuttered window down on her golden hair!

Then she remembered that though to an artist's eye the dusty little shop and the beautiful woman behind the counter were extremely picturesque, yet life among those dingy surroundings was not exactly suited to a young lady of gentle birth.

"And all the time she was the rightful mistress of—all this." Her ladyship gave an expressive wave of the hand toward the luxuriously-furnished room. "It must be admitted that Mr. Le Marchant has played his cards with skill, if not with honesty. Well, his reign draws to a close. To-morrow the first blow must be struck."

Lady Villebois dined in her own room. When occasional sounds of music reached her later in the evening, she smiled somewhat grimly to herself. It was probably the last time Mrs. Le Marchant would play the hostess at Dallas Towers.

"The tocsin will sound to-morrow," she murmured to herself, as she caught the distant sounds of talk and laughter. Once a feeling of compunction stirred her. It was when Sybil slipped upstairs to inquire how she was. The girl's eyes were very bright, and her soft, dimpled cheeks were flushed with dancing. She looked charming in her lemon-colored evening-dress.

It was not an agreeable reflection to know that she was

going to strip this pretty child of her wealth. But no; after all, things were not so bad. Sybil was going to marry Felix Ormerod: the brunt of the storm would not fall on her. As for Mrs. Le Marchant, I fear her ladyship had no visitings of remorse on her account.

Lady Villebois passed a sleepless night. Her brain was ceaselessly at work piecing together the scraps of information she had elicited with so much difficulty from Atherstone. When morning at last dawned she fell into a troubled sleep which lasted until her maid came into the room with her early cup of tea.

Though superior to so many of her sex's weaknesses, Lady Villebois woke that morning with a severe headache. The unusual amount of physical exertion she had gone through on the previous day, added to the various emotions she had experienced, had their inevitable result—reaction. A momentary fear seized her that she was really ill. The idea of being laid up at Dallas Towers—in the very stronghold of the enemy—at a time when her presence in town was indispensable to the successful carrying out of her plans, was so alarming that her mettlesome heart quailed for a moment. The maid saw the change in her mistress' features, and insisted on her breakfasting in bed. Her ladyship would be better when she had eaten something. Food is the one panacea for illness of body or mind, according to the ideas of most of her class. "A square meal" is a sovereign remedy for all the ills to which flesh is heir.

Lady Villebois fervently hoped it would be so in her case, and took her handmaid's advice with much resignation. When her breakfast-tray appeared, it brought not only her breakfast, but a surprise in the shape of a small, three-cornered note. It was from Mr. Le Marchant, and ran as follows:

"DEAR LADY VILLEBOIS—I am extremely sorry to hear of Miss Lowry's sudden departure, and quite understand the anxiety you must be suffering on her account. Would you give me the honor of five minutes' private conversation in the library some time this morning? I have something to propose that will, I doubt not, have your entire

approval, and will, I hope, be much to Miss Lowry's advantage. Sincerely yours,

"BERNARD LE MARCHANT."

The note had a magical effect on Lady Villebois. No tonic could have braced her better. She ate her breakfast with a fair appetite, and sent a message by her maid to Mr. Le Marchant, telling him that she would be in the library in an hour. In less time than that she was dressed and seated at her writing-table consulting a "Bradshaw," while her maid was engaged in packing.

"When you have done that, go to Miss Lowry's room, and pack her boxes. I am going up to town by the twelve o'clock train," she said, rising.

The maid, whose curiosity had been considerably excited by Miss Lowry's sudden departure, went methodically about her work, while her imagination—which had been stimulated by much reading of penny novels—was busy in weaving a romance in which Miss Lowry figured as the long-lost daughter of a duke, stolen in infancy, and brought up in poverty, to be finally restored to her rightful sphere, and married to another duke of fabulous wealth and transcendental good looks.

"And richly she'd deserve it," exclaimed the abigail, enthusiastically, as she folded Miss Lowry's gowns with a careful hand. "I never saw a lady who was fit to hold a candle to her."

Unlike most dependants, Vivien was loved instead of hated by every member of Lady Villebois' household.

Mr. Le Marchant, who looked as if he also had passed a sleepless night, was seated before an open escritoire when Lady Villebois entered the library. He rose at once, placed a chair for her, and made some polite inquiries after her health.

These civilities exchanged—after the manner of a couple of duelists who, while words of conventional courtesy are on their lips, are mentally taking each other's measure, and wondering who will be the first to draw blood—Lady Villebois boldly took the initiative.

"You wished to speak to me about Miss Lowry," she said, fixing her bright, blue eyes on his face.

Le Marchant, with the skill of a practiced tactician, had taken up his position with his back to the light; but, in spite of this advantage, her ladyship saw that he changed countenance.

"Yes," he said, in a low voice. "I think you know that Miss Lowry is a distant relation of mine?"

"She is the granddaughter of your predecessor here—your uncle, the late Mr. Dallas."

Le Marchant bowed.

"Exactly; you have been correctly informed on that point. The late Mrs. Lowry married against her father's wish, and was disinherited. I had quite lost sight of her child—indeed, until I met Miss Lowry here a few weeks ago, I had no idea that she survived her parents."

Lady Villebois smiled ever so slightly, but refrained from making any comments.

"As Miss Lowry is a relation of mine, I am anxious that she should be suitably provided for. I intend to settle the sum of £5,000 on her."

"You are very generous," remarked her ladyship, with a touch of sarcasm that did not escape Le Marchant. He started and looked up quickly.

"You do not think £5,000 is a sufficient sum?"

"What is the rent-roll of the Dallas property?" asked the other, in her quietest tones.

Le Marchant's sallow skin turned a greenish white, and a nervous tremor at the corners of his mouth told that the arrow had struck home. In a moment he had regained his self-control, and steadily met the keen glance she bent upon him.

"I do not understand the drift of your remark," he said, slowly.

"Then I will try to make my meaning plainer, Mr. Le Marchant. I am sorry you have sought this interview with me. I hoped to defer this very unpleasant business until I was no longer your guest; but, as you have yourself broken the ice, I have no alternative but to explain fully my present position toward you."

"Pray proceed," said Le Marchant, dryly, as she

paused. "I am quite in the dark. Pray enlighten me."

Something in his tone roused her ire. She rose with dignity and stood facing him with a set look on her handsome face.

"Mr. Le Marchant, I have positive proof of your guilt, or I should scarcely venture to accuse you in your own house of a most mean and dastardly crime. You have suppressed the will under which the late Mr. Dallas tried, as I believe, to atone for his injustice toward his daughter."

"Indeed! This is a most serious charge to bring against me, Lady Villebois. Fortunately, I am able to disprove it. I have in my possession a copy of Mr. Dallas' will, which I shall be most happy to show you."

"A will made in the year 1858?"

"Yes."

"That will is simply waste-paper. Mr. Dallas made a second will a few months before his death."

"I shall be glad to see this document. If you have 'positive proof' of my crime, you are, of course, prepared to produce it?"

Lady Villebois paused; for a moment she was nonplused. A tiresome question presented itself to her mind. Supposing that Mr. Dallas had made this will, and Le Marchant had got possession of it and destroyed it, what proof would she have that it had ever existed? Le Marchant read her countenance with his keen, red-brown eyes, and a smile of triumph flickered for a moment over his hard, thin-lipped mouth.

"Am I to understand that you are *not* in a position to produce this will?"

"I have good reason to believe that it exists—that it *did* exist I have, as I said, positive proof."

"That will hardly be sufficient to invalidate my title to the estates. My dear Lady Villebois, I fear you have been the victim either of a hoax or—"

"If I cannot produce the will, I can confront you with one of the witnesses to the will," she interrupted, eagerly.

"May I ask his or her name?"

"For the present I must decline to give it. And now, Mr. Le Marchant, I will bid you good-morning—and good-by. I leave Dallas Towers in the course of an hour."

"I am sorry your visit has had so unpleasant an ending," he said, as he opened the door for her to pass out.

He waited until her figure disappeared up the wide staircase, and then closed and locked the door, and flung himself into an easy-chair to think. The storm had burst at last.

For the moment he was so stunned by the news he had just heard that his brain was incapable of working to any purpose. The vague fears that had assailed him on the previous evening, when he learned from Sybil that Miss Lowry had been called to town on business, took a tangible shape now. Of course the girl was aware of everything; she and Lady Villebois had been working in concert. The long-expected blow had fallen. His sin had found him out. The fabric he had reared at such cost was shattered in an hour. The wealth he had longed for, plotted for, sinned for, was slipping from his grasp. The yellow slave, that had done so much for him, would smooth his life-path no longer. He had scaled triumphantly the social ladder; he must begin again at the lowest rung.

Then a revulsion of feeling swept over him. His combative instincts were roused. He clinched his hands fiercely. No; he would not throw up the cards yet. He would fight it out. Was he, Bernard Le Marchant, to be outwitted by a couple of scheming women? No, let them do their worst! He defied them. His title to Dallas Towers could never be impeached. Let them produce this will. He had not been such a fool as to hide that damaging document in a secret drawer or behind a sliding panel in the conventional manner. He was safe.

Then a thought struck him like a sledge-hammer. The witnesses to the will—who were they? He ought to have made a note of their names before he burned it. He had been so anxious to get the document out of the way that he had only glanced rapidly through it. He was certain

that Watts, the valet, was one witness; who the other was he could not for the life of him remember.

"Watts is safe enough," he muttered to himself; "dead men tell no tales. I think Rudd must have been the second witness; if so, Lady Vllebois may do her worst. And yet—she spoke very positively about her proofs."

An anxious look came into his eyes. They say that in the annals of crime detection is generally incurred because the criminal, however skillfully he may have planned out the details of his crime, generally makes one blunder, one false step. Le Marchant, clever as he was, had made a mistake the veriest bungler might have avoided. He racked his brains to remember the name of the second witness. This unknown, unnamed individual who was to rise up and accuse him haunted him like a nightmare.

Every one is familiar with the irritating mental experience of trying to recall something known to be latent in the memory, but which obstinately refuses to come forth in a clear and definte shape. This travail of the mind did not tend to soothe Le Marchant's overstrung nerves. The shock he had experienced when Lady Villebois made her declaration of war had been a severe one. It had needed all his powers of self-repression to enable him to keep his temper. Now he was alone, the curb was loosened, and for a moment he gave way to the fierce passion which lurked unsuspected under the granite hardness of his exterior.

He paced rapidly up and down the library, his pale face working convulsively, his hands clinched until the nails ran into the palms, his eyes alight with a dull fire. The security of his position no longer seemed unassailable. He was mad with rage as he cursed his own stupidity in omitting that one precaution: to record the name of the second witness to the will. If Rudd were not the man, who was it? Was it any one who could be bought, bribed, cajoled? He must find out, at all costs. Anything was better than this maddening uncertainty.

He was like a belated traveler astray in a tangled wilderness, dreading the onslaught of an invisible enemy.

Any moment a staggering blow might descend on his head, and fell him to the earth. He was powerless to defend himself. Memory refused to throw one ray on the thick, shrouding darkness. His unknown adversary remained wrapped in shadow. As he paced up and down the library, a mist seemed stealing over his faculties; his brain was growing dull; he could not think clearly. What had come to him? A numbness was creeping over his body. Some danger threatened him—what was it? Everything seemed dark, dim, shapeless. Yes; now he remembered. Lady Villebois had just told him something about a will. She was a meddling old woman—it was an unlucky hour that brought her across his path; but she would be powerless to harm him. He laughed aloud and flung his arms out in a gesture of wild triumph. Did she think he was a fool?

Then the mists floated again over his brain. He was groping through a forest of shadows—shadows that curled fantastically about him; now taking human shapes—horrible phantoms that grinned and pointed long skinny fingers at him; now melting to vapor—a vapor that was suffocating, blinding, nauseating. Into what dreadful world had his spirit strayed? Was he dead, or was this the world beyond the grave?

A booming, thunderous sound was in his ears. There was a throbbing in his temples like the beating of a thousand hammers. He staggered as if the blows were in truth falling on his head, and clutched wildly at vacancy. The ground was slipping from under his feet, the whole world reeled, he was falling—falling through lurid clouds down, down to oblivion.

BOOK THE FIFTH.

TIME'S REVENGES.

Thus the whirligig of Time
Brings in his revenges.—SHAKESPEARE.

CHAPTER I.

LADY VILLEBOIS MEDITATES.

CONTRARY to her usual custom, Lady Villebois lingered in town through the autumn, and Rollestone House, instead of being condemned to brown-holland desolation, was as bright as fires and flowers could make it. October winds had thinned the trees, and October rains had beaten down the heads of the late autumn roses, and marred the beauty of the velvet lawns; but the grand old cedars defied wind and rain. They looked down in magnificent but sober state, watching the havoc wrought among the flowers, and gave shelter to a regiment of forlorn and bedraggled sparrows cowering under their widespread branches from the sharp lash of the driving rain.

If the exterior of Rollestone House was cheerless, the interior was bright enough. The long, many-windowed drawing-room was aglow with the gorgeous blaze of the logs which crackled and sputtered on the open hearth. By the fireside sat Lady Villebois. She was alone, and her mobile face wore an expression of thoughtful abstraction. Her hands lay idly on her lap—she was not one of those women who find needlework soothing to the mind. As she was fond of saying, she could only do one thing well at a time.

Just then her whole mental energy was employed in thinking, therefore knitting or tatting or any other feminine trifling of the sort would have been to her in the last degree irksome. She sat quite moveless in her comfortable arm-chair, for she possessed the faculty—a rare

one—of perfect repose; no fidgety movements of hands or feet or head marred the charming picture she made.

It was a pity some artist could not see and perpetuate that firelit room and its solitary occupant. With her white hair, her fine, clear-featured face, her rich-hued satin gown catching crimson gleams from the fire on its thick, heavy folds, her thin, blue-veined hands, on which sparkled some of the famed Rollestone diamonds, clasped in her lap, Lady Villebois was the beau-ideal of a *grande dame* of the old school—a school which seems doomed to extinction, the restlessness of modern life not being favorable to its existence.

The room was very quiet. A small Sèvres clock kept up a monotonous tick-tack on a side-table; the fire crackled when the flames undermined the logs; now and again the rain dashed on the windows, and the wind wailed through the trees, but these occasional sounds only intensified the intervals of stillness when the never-varying tick-tack of the clock asserted itself pertinaciously.

Lady Villebois noticed neither the silence nor the sounds. Her mind was concentrated on other matters, so she was to all intents and purposes deaf and blind. Her outward eyes were fixed on the yellow tongues of flame leaping up the wide chimney, but her mental vision was filled by far different scenes. The events of the past two months gave her plenty to think about, and that October afternoon she was mentally reviewing all that had happened since she left Dallas Towers.

Vivien was still at Camberwell. All Lady Villebois' entreaties had not availed to draw her from the seclusion of Mr. Muffles' back-shop. When pressed as to her reasons for forsaking the primrose-path, and choosing instead the dreary ways of poverty, she only smiled sadly, and said the latter suited her temperament better.

"I want work; idleness enervates me. Dear friend, let me go my own way," she said, when Lady Villebois had exhausted all her arguments. "If you ever really need me; if you are ill or sad, I will come to you."

And so Lady Villebois had been obliged to relinquish for the present all idea of bringing Vivien back in triumph

to Rollestone House. There were times when the girl's obstinacy vexed her, but her anger never lasted long. Her affection for her was unchanged. She had the greatest confidence in her judgment, and she was certain that some strong motive prompted her to act as she had. Her absence, however, did not prevent Lady Villebois from carrying out her plans for winning, or trying to win back Vivien's lost inheritance.

Since her return from Dallas Towers, she had been sedulously employed in hunting up evidence in support of her theory that Jabez Rudd had been an accomplice of Le Marchant in the matter of suppressing or destroying Mr. Dallas' will. She had been tolerably successful, inasmuch as she had traced a clerk who had been in Rudd's employ at the time, and had drawn up the document for his employer. But this witness, though valuable, was not of the first importance, because, though he was ready to swear that the will had been prepared, he could not be certain it had ever been signed by Mr. Dallas.

Another rebuff Lady Villebois received was the discovery that the valet, Watts, the second witness of the will, had predeceased his master by a few days, so that Atherstone's testimony was the sole evidence in favor of her case. The news of Mr. Le Marchant's sudden illness reached her soon after her arrival in town, but she knew neither the cause nor the nature of his illness. No communication of any sort had passed between Rollestone House and Dallas Towers. She had not seen Ormerod, and was ignorant of the fact that the wedding had been postponed until November. She had often thought of Sybil, and felt more than one twinge of regret that circumstances should have compelled her to assume a bellicose attitude toward her. Whenever these twinges of regret troubled her, she invariably soothed them by reflecting that, after all, Sybil would not suffer very severely by her father's ruin. As Ormerod's wife, she would be shielded from the disgrace which must fall on Le Marchant himself, and, though she must lose the position of an heiress, Ormerod's fortune, though not large, would be sufficient for both. Every morning she scanned the

first column of the *Times*, in the hope of reading the announcement of the marriage. She would have been glad to know that Sybil's future was assured before the crash came.

Many of the complications that had resulted from her meeting Atherstone at the Towers puzzled her, but she had no time to waste on idle conjectures about the motive which prompted the actions of the persons concerned in this affair. Vivien had chosen to leave Dallas Towers in the most abrupt manner. She had returned to the life of hardship from which she, Lady Villebois, had rescued her. Atherstone had fallen in love with Sybil, and was probably making himself wretched at the thought that he had unwittingly dealt Sybil's father a crushing blow. Ormerod had carefully avoided her, and Le Marchant remained apparently inactive at Dallas Towers, for the present master of the position. What was the good of wasting time in unraveling these tanglings of Fate?

She had her work marked out, namely, to throw light if possible on certain dark episodes in Le Marchant's past life. Vivien had withdrawn from the scene; it remained for her self-elected champion to look after her interests. Perhaps the girl's presence at Rollestone, while its mistress was constantly interviewing solicitors and detectives, would have been embarrassing, for Vivien had never manifested much eagerness regarding her supposed "rights," and it was more than probable that she would have thrown cold water on Lady Villebois' researches. Nevertheless, the latter was often conscious of the void her absence made, and that gusty, rainy autumn afternoon, as she sat silent and thoughtful by the fireside, she felt somewhat depressed. She would have given a great deal to see Vivien enter the room and seat herself in the big arm-chair opposite her own.

It was all very well to spend her days in working out her case against Le Marchant, but when evening came she longed for a quiet talk with the girl she had grown to love. This silence grew at last oppressive. She was tired of her own thoughts; tired of the legal technicalities through which she had been compelled to wade, tired of

the whole subject of Vivien's "rights." She wanted human companionship, above all she wanted to see Vivien. She moved in her chair and stretched out her hand to the bell. She would ring for lamps and occupy herself with a book. Like many another solitary human being she determined that, failing human companionship, she would take refuge from her own thoughts in those of a favorite author.

The firelight was pleasant, but it encouraged thought, and she was weary of thinking. Before her hand touched the bell she heard the sound of wheels on the drive. Her solitude was about to be broken. A look of vexation crossed her face. She was not in the humor for receiving ordinary visitors. The prospect of listening to small-talk for half an hour was more distasteful even than solitude. Before she had recovered her equanimity, the door was thrown open and Wilson announced,

"Mr. Ormerod."

CHAPTER II.

AN APPEAL.

As Ormerod came forward from the shadow of the heavy portière which draped the door, into the full light of the blazing fire, Lady Villebois saw that he was greatly changed. He looked grave, careworn, almost old.

"I am very glad to see you again, Mr. Ormerod," she said, when they had shaken hands. "It seems a long time since we met. Have you been out of town all the autumn? Is that the reason you have not come to see me before?"

"I have been at Compton Magna a good deal lately."

"On politics intent, I suppose? I hope the free and independent electors promise to be docile."

"That remains to be seen," he answered, indifferently. "Miss Lowry is not with you?" he added, abruptly.

Lady Villebois looked at him curiously. In manner he was altered even more than in appearance. He was ab-

rupt, eager—quite unlike the cool, calm, self-confident Ormerod of former days.

"No; Miss Lowry is not living at Rollestone House now."

"Where is she? You know where she is, of course?"

"Oh, yes; I know where she is."

"Will you give me her address?" he said, leaning forward eagerly.

"I cannot promise that," she replied, looking at him with growing astonishment.

"Why not?"

"I do not think she would wish it."

Ormerod glanced sharply across at her. He bit his lip and frowned. As he read the surprise depicted on her expressive face, he was conscious of the extraordinary complexion his request must wear to one who knew nothing of the *dessous des cartes.* A sudden impulse prompted him to enlighten her. He had suffered much for many weeks, and he was growing reckless.

"I must see her," he said, impatiently. "I am tired of acting in this comedy of errors."

"What comedy of errors, Mr. Ormerod?"

"The comedy will probably become a tragedy, if matters go on like this," he returned, gloomily. "Lady Villebois, why has Miss Lowry left you?"

"That is precisely the question I have been trying to answer these past two months."

"But you know where she is?"

"Certainly."

"Lady Villebois, I was the cause of her sudden flight to London," he said, plunging straight *in medias res.*

She stared at him incredulously. For the moment she fancied her ears must have deceived her.

"Yes," he went on, recklessly. "I was mad enough to tell Miss Lowry that I loved her, and to avoid me she left Grasshire."

"You told her that! Mr. Ormerod, you amaze me! You were then engaged to Miss Le Marchant. Am I to understand you that the engagement is now broken off?"

Ormerod was silent. The plain question put the whole

affair before him in its true light. His conduct had been in the last degree dishonorable; he could not defend it. Lady Villebois watched him in eager surprise. That he was changed, she had seen the moment he entered the room; now she studied his face at her leisure, she was shocked to see the lines of care which furrowed his forehead and the look of weariness and depression that lurked about his mouth. His eyes she could not read, for they were bent on the ground.

"No doubt you think me a mean sort of scoundrel," he said at last, lifting his eyes suddenly with a look almost of defiance. "I have been to blame, no doubt. But I love Miss Lowry as I can never love any other woman."

"I cannot listen to any rhapsodies, Mr. Ormerod, until you have answered my question," she said, sternly. "Are you still engaged to Miss Le Marchant?"

"Yes—I suppose so."

"Then I must say I think your conduct—" she began, impulsively.

"I cordially indorse all you can say in condemnation of it," he interrupted, bitterly. "You cannot possibly blame me more than I blame myself. I came here," he went on, calmly, "to make one last appeal to Miss Lowry. She is not here; do you refuse to let me know where she is?"

"I refuse emphatically."

"Then, Lady Villebois, I will lay the whole case before you, if you will give me your attention for a few minutes."

He leaned forward in his chair, squared his elbows on his knees, and fixed his eyes full on her face. He was unusually pale, and the lines of his mouth and chin hardened into sternness. He looked a great deal more like a judge about to pass sentence on a criminal, than a lover about to confide his woes to an interested if not sympathetic listener. Like most of her sex, Lady Villebois was always impressed by any exhibition of masculine strength either of mind or body. When Ormerod's eyes were fixed on the floor, when he spoke of his love, and accused himself of folly in the same breath, she assumed the se-

verity of a critic, and was ready to carry matters with a high hand. If she had not spoken daggers she had looked them, and the latter method is not infrequently the more effective. She had been indignant that he, an "engaged man," had ventured to tell Vivien of his love, and she had not hesitated to show her anger.

But now that he boldly took up his position, with the evident determination to defend it to the last gasp, she quailed. Already her heart relented. She was not too old to feel sympathy with an unhappy affair of the heart, and she had the true feminine delight in receiving confidences on such a subject. Ormerod saw that her interest was already aroused and was proportionately encouraged.

"We have always been very good friends, Lady Villebois," he began, coolly. "But I do not ask you to judge me leniently; I only ask you to hear me out to the end. It shall be justice unseasoned by mercy, if you like," he added, with a rather bitter smile. "I shall be satisfied with justice only."

"What a formidable preamble!" she exclaimed, trying to speak lightly. "Are you expecting to be called to the Bar shortly, and is this a sort of informal rehearsal of your maiden address to the twelve honest men? Come," she added, dropping her bantering tone, "I am not a very formidable person. As you say, we have always been good friends, and I am by no means disposed to treat your confidence in an unfriendly spirit."

"I am glad to hear it."

"One question, Mr. Ormerod, before you go on—is your marriage with Miss Le Marchant postponed indefinitely?"

"The marriage is fixed for the second week in November."

"So soon! Really, Mr. Ormerod, I—but I promised to suspend judgment."

"Thank you," he returned, dryly. "I will state the position as briefly as I can. I have been engaged since last June to Miss Le Marchant. Unfortunately, I found out some weeks afterward that my affection for her was not so deep nor so lasting as I had believed it to be."

"Masculine fickleness!" murmured her ladyship, under her breath. Luckily Ormerod did not hear the remark.

"Instead, I discovered that in Miss Lowry I had found the woman I could both love and reverence—the woman whose love would make me entirely happy. For some time I tried to crush this growing affection; I believed it not only hopeless but wrong, for I was already an engaged man. But, in spite of me, it grew and strengthened. Love is not so easily rooted out. So matters went on until the day of the picnic in Oak Hill Wood. I suppose there is a fate in these things. That day the truth came out—I spoke to Vivien—I told her that I loved her."

"And what did she say?" inquired her ladyship, eagerly. Being a woman, the love-story interested her so much that she forgot to administer any rebuke.

Ormerod paused; a dusky flush spread over his face. He could not confess, even to Lady Villebois, that Vivien loved him. It would be akin to sacrilege.

"She sent me away, and bade me never see her again," he said, at last.

He knew that the words would convey the impression that his love for Vivien was unreturned. But what could he do? To avow the truth would strengthen his case, for it would be not only his best excuse for breaking with Sybil, but Lady Villebois' sympathy would be enlisted. Yet he shrank sensitively from betraying the secret that was hers as well as his.

"And, in spite of this, you wish to force yourself on her?" she asked, in her sternest tones.

Again he was silenced. How events told against him! How despicable his conduct must seem to her!

"What purpose would be served, if I *did* give you Vivien's address?" she pursued, coldly. "If you had the temerity to speak to her again in that strain, you would, in all probability, receive the same answer."

"I love her. I would make one more appeal to her," he urged.

But he saw his case was lost. Lady Villebois had already judged and condemned him.

"Such love is unworthy of you, Mr. Ormerod. I can-

not imagine a man wishing to win a woman who does not care for him."

Again he reddened; but he bit his lips and kept silent.

"There is only one course open to you, as far as I can see," she went on, calmly. "Marry Miss Le Marchant. You loved her once—at least, I suppose so, or you would not have asked her to be your wife. No doubt you will learn to love her again. You will get over this romantic affection for Vivien, and probably your married life will reach the ordinary standard of connubial happiness. Marriage is always a lottery, you know."

"It is not like you to speak so cynically," remarked Ormerod, quietly. "I thought I should be sure of hearing noble words from you on such a subject."

Lady Villebois winced. A quiver of pain passed over her face. The shaft had winged its way straight to her heart. Ormerod knew nothing of that old story of her long acquaintance with conjugal misery, or he would rather have cut off his right hand than have sped it home. How a careless word, a thoughtless allusion will make an old and half-forgotten wound throb and tingle! The hurt was inflicted long ago. It had healed, or she thought it had healed. But this implied reproach tore it open. It bled afresh, and the agony of it whitened her face and filled her eyes with the slow, painful tears of age. He saw that he had hurt her, and hastened to apply verbal balm. But she stopped him at once, and quietly asked if Sybil had any idea that he had wavered in his allegiance to her.

"She is such a child," Ormerod answered, evasively, "and I don't think she is particularly observant."

"Then you have not spoken to her on the subject?"

"No."

"Then take my advice; never do so. It would be a fatal blow to her happiness—and your own. A woman never forgives a slight of that sort. Sybil is a good little girl. I believe she is sincerely attached to you—you ought to consider yourself a fortunate man. Marry her, and forget this mid-summer madness. I grieve to think you should have pained Miss Lowry by placing her in a

position of unconscious and unwilling rivalry to Sybil. If you knew all the circumstances of the case, you would agree with me that there is only one possible way out of this imbroglio. Marry Sybil, and try to make her happy."

She spoke with such strange earnestness that Ormerod was fairly puzzled. Lady Villebois had never shown any affection or Sybil, why should she be so bent on securing her happiness?

"Mr. Ormerod," she went on, with increasing eagerness, "if you loved Vivien a thousand times more than you do, still you ought to marry Sybil. You asked her to marry you when her future seemed assured, now that—" she paused, and looked fixedly at him.

A momentary suspicion crossed her mind that he had heard rumors of Le Marchant's crime, and shrank from marrying the daughter of the criminal. But she put the thought away with shame. He would never be guilty of such injustice and such meanness.

"I don't understand you," he said, meeting her eyes frankly. "Miss Le Marchant will be a very rich woman. It seems to me that that fact makes things all the easier for me. My worst enemy could not accuse me of fortune-hunting," he added, with a smile; "Miss Lowry is penniless, and, forgive me for saying it, in the position of a dependent, while Sybil—"

"Stop!" interrupted the other, hastily, "let us keep Miss Lowry's name out of the discussion. Mr. Ormerod," she went on, impressively, "if I tell you that Miss Le Marchant is *not* an heiress, that she is practically penniless, that her position will soon be infinitely worse than that of a dependent, will you believe that I speak with authority? I tell you that you are bound in honor to marry this girl. You asked her to be your wife when everything seemed fair and promising; you must not break with her now that trouble and poverty, and perhaps shame, threaten her."

"Shame!" repeated Ormerod, knitting his brows; "shame to Sybil?"

"Yes, through her father. Mr. Le Marchant has placed himself in the power of the law. Not an acre of the

Dallas estate belongs to him, nor a shilling of the Dallas rent-roll."

"But—"

"Don't interrupt me, please. I know my words must seem incredible, but I assure you they are absolutely true, and, what is more, I can prove that they are so. Mr. Le Marchant secured the possession of the Dallas property by a fraud—a fraud which I am about to expose."

"You, Lady Villebois! In what way have you become involved in Mr. Le Marchant's affairs?"

She saw her mistake at once. Having admitted so much, there was nothing for it but to tell everything.

"In my position as Miss Lowry's guardian," she answered, coolly. "She and not Sybil is the heiress of Dallas Towers. Now, Mr. Ormerod, you see how utterly impossible it would be for you, as a man of honor, to forsake Sybil for her cousin."

"Her cousin! Dear Lady Villebois, have a little pity on my ignorance. I am completely in the dark. Don't torture me with hints, tell me all there is to tell in plain language."

Thus adjured, she told him briefly of Le Marchant's treachery, his relationship to Vivien, and every detail of the case she was then working out against him. Ormerod listened in silence. Outwardly he was calm. His pale, set face and steady eyes did not betray the battle of conflicting emotions that was being fought out in his breast. Love for Vivien, pity for Sybil, and contemptuous anger against Le Marchant alternately won the day. But clear above all rose the certainty that Lady Villebois' story left him no loophole of escape from the net of perplexities which entangled him. He had come to Rollestone House that afternoon with some hope of seeing Vivien and overruling the decision she made two months ago; but now he saw the futility of that hope. The barrier which separated them towered higher, shutting him out from her presence forever.

"You are right, Lady Villebois," he said at last, when

she had told him everything. "I cannot break off my engagement with Miss Le Marchant now."

Her ladyship looked considerably relieved. It would have pained her deeply to know that Vivien should have unwittingly wrecked Sybils happiness. She held out her hand to Ormerod and smiled brightly.

"You have taken a load off my mind," she said, as he rose and took the offered hand. "I hope and believe you will be happy with Sybil. Her character is docile—most men like a wife they can mold as they will—and then she is so charmingly pretty!"

Ormerod smiled rather sardonically; but he did not pursue the subject. Her words seemed such a bitter satire on the views he had once so tenaciously held.

"And the wedding is to take pace the second week in November?" pursued her ladyship, mercilessly. Ormerod had not resumed his chair, but stood on the hearth-rug looking gloomily into the fire.

"Yes," he answered, slowly. "Atherstone is to be my best-man. He is your principal witness in the impending lawsuit, I think you said. Is Mr. Le Marchant aware of the fact?"

"I believe not."

"Then perhaps you will hold your hand until after the wedding. I should like Sybil to be my wife before the crash comes—and it would not be pleasant for Atherstone to stand in a hostile position toward the Le Marchants, if he is to be my best-man," he added, with a bitter smile.

"No steps of any kind shall be taken until after the wedding. I am as anxious as you are to spare Sybil any unnecessary pain. Mr. Atherstone's silence can be relied on, since he has not mentioned the subject even to an intimate friend like yourself."

"Oh, yes. Atherstone is discretion itself."

"Very well, then, I will conclude an armistice with Mr. Le Marchant until after his daughter's wedding. By-the-by, I heard some report about his being ill. Is it true?"

"Yes; he had a seizure of some sort—a slight paralytic stroke, I believe—on the day you left the Towers. He

was found insensible in the library. It was nothing very serious, but he looks much aged and shaken. Atherstone, who studied medicine in his youth, says his system has received a severe shock, and that he will never be the same man again."

"I am very sorry to hear it," she rejoined, gravely. "I had no idea the illness was anything so serious. Mr. Le Marchant is one of those men who give an impression of almost superhuman vitality. It is impossible to picture him ill or weak, or suffering in any way. Mentally and physically, he seemed of iron build."

"Yes; but a man of that inflexible fiber is sometimes shattered to a wreck when a man of more pliable character would suffer little," said Ormerod. "It is a case of the oak and the reed."

"Perhaps," returned the other, dryly. "I confess, however, that I feel no disposition to spare him. He inflicted terrible sufferings on the Lowrys; it looks as if this illness were a visiting of Nemesis."

"Nemesis in your person will soon avenge Mr. Dallas to the full," replied Ormerod. "Le Marchant is just the sort of man to fall like Lucifer—never to hope again. I suppose you have taken as your motto: *Fiat justitia, ruat cœlum*, Lady Villebois," he added, dryly. Then a sudden thought struck him. "Does Miss Lowry know of your plans?" he asked, suddenly turning to her.

"She knows something, but not much. She has no idea that Mr. Atherstone is concerned in the matter, or that I have any positive evidence to bring forward. I spoke to her on the subject before the visit to Dallas Towers, but I have kept all these later discoveries secret."

"*She* would have been more merciful," thought Ormerod, as he took his leave and went out again into the gray twilight.

He had dismissed the hansom that had brought him to Chiswick, and as he walked past the gloomy cedars a memory came back to him of a sunny June afternoon when the golden sunlight lay warm on the velvety lawn —a day of light and color and fragrance. He looked back at the gray facade of Rollestone House, and up at the

dull gray sky. The rain had ceased, but a damp, clinging mist hung about the trees. Ormerod, though not of an impressionable temperament, felt his spirits depressed to zero. The afternoon was as gray and cheerless as his own future promised to be. The memory of Vivien standing under the cedar, with the well-remembered look of expectancy in her eyes, pierced him with a keen pang. He walked across the sodden turf and stood under the shadow of the old cedar. He took off his hat. To him it was sacred ground. He must bury his love-dream in a deep grave; it should lie there under the cedar, for there it had been born.

The rain-drops dripped heavily from the branches as if the noble tree wept tears of compassion over the grave. The whole scene was funereal. The gray mist hung like a pall over the black cedar-boughs; the gray old house looked like a giant tomb. It was a dreary world of gray and black shadow. Suddenly the mournful silence was broken by the slow strokes of a tolling bell. It was only the deep-toned bell of a neighboring church ringing for evening service, but to Ormerod it seemed typical. He was burying his love-dream, and this was its funeral knell.

CHAPTER III.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

DURING those dull and too often dreary autumn months, Mrs. Le Marchant thought herself a most sorely tried and long-suffering woman. Since the summer everything seemed to go wrong at Dallas Towers, and its mistress had a fair share of mundane worries laid on her elegant shoulders. Her husband's sudden illness and the consequent breaking-up of the party assembled to meet Lady Villebois, was an event so entirely out of the range of what she considered probable that she thought herself personally aggrieved thereat. It seemed to her so ridiculous that a strong man like Le Marchant—who, previously, had never known a day's illness—should be

struck down so suddenly and apparently so causelessly; still more ridiculous that instead of rallying from the blow he should sink into a state of semi-invalidism.

Selina did not like to see her husband looking pale and weak and nervous—that was her *métier*. It annoyed her dreadfully to see Sybil hovering about his chair with a tender solicitude she had never lavished on her; consequently, Mrs. Le Marchant kept to her own room as much as possible, and her husband and daughter were left to themselves for the greater part of the day. Sybil evidently liked the office of nurse, while she, Selina, was far too fragile for anything of the sort. It tired her to read aloud, and her husband liked to be read to for hours together. Why should she injure her delicate chest and weak throat by overtasking her voice in his service, when Sybil was ready to read on like a vocal automaton as long as her father liked to listen to her? Why should she sit by his chair, and arrange his pillows, and give him his medicine at the right hour, when Sybil declared that nothing pleased her better than to spend her whole time in waiting on the invalid?

Clearly there was not the slightest necessity for such self-abnegation on her part. She had her own health to consider, and the wisest thing she could do was to remain passive. Sybil was strong and hearty; *her* constitution had never been tried by the cares of wifehood and motherhood, argued Selina. It was obviously Sybil's duty to bear the burden which was so much too heavy for her mother's shoulders.

Le Marchant was probably the gainer by the arrangement. His wife's peevishness and cold selfishness would have irritated him beyond endurance in those days of his weakness, while Sybil made an ideal nurse. Her voice was always soft and gentle, and the touch of her pretty, white hands was as soothing as her voice. It was delightful to watch her move about the room with an air of innocent self-importance. Her charming face was so fresh, so flower-like in its youth and bloom, and her large eyes had an expression of serious thought which gave new beauty to her glance.

Le Marchant had never lavished much affection on his pretty daughter, but her readiness to wait on him, when he was weak in body and weary in spirit, woke in him a sort of reluctant gratitude. Like most men who all their lives have been strangers to physical suffering, and somewhat impatient of weakness in others, when illness at last came, Le Marchant grew irritable and nervous, and very hard to please. When Sybil read to him, he found fault with her enunciation, accused her of inaccurate pronunciation, and asked crossly why she persisted in reading too fast; "he could not follow her when she gabbled at the rate of three hundred words a minute."

Sybil bore these and other complaints with exemplary patience and never-varying sweetness. With instinctive tact, she adapted herself to all his moods, and humored all his whims; and was never so happy as when she won from him an approving word or smile. Man of iron as he was, her gentleness and obedience softened and humanized him.

As the weeks went on, and the dreary autumn afternoons shortened, he grew strangely dependent on her. His pretty daughter's presence was essential to his comfort. No one but Sybil could arrange his pillows as he liked; no one but Sybil could read intelligibly; no one else could be trusted to measure out his medicine; and when the weather was fine, and he felt stronger, he would suffer no one but Sybil to drive him out.

On bright autumn mornings, when the sky was swept clear of mist by a fresh, southwest wind, those drives in Sybil's pony-carriage varied pleasantly the dull monotony of the invalid's life.

"Why, papa, I declare you are quite rosy," remarked the girl, with pardonable exaggeration, as they drove through the village one brilliant October forenoon.

The sunshine was warm with a memory of summer; autumn flowers bloomed in the cottage gardens, and the almost leafless apple-trees still bore a sprinkling of red-cheeked fruit. Le Marchant looked about him with a feeling of revived interest in life. Since the day he had been struck down by the terrible foe, paralysis, he had

sunk into a state of mental lethargy. Thought became irksome to him; it was impossible to fix his attention long on any subject. But that morning the blue, sunny sky, the fresh, soft wind that kept the sparse, yellowing leaves moving on the boughs, gave him a vague sensation of pleasure. His dulled faculties stirred, thought grew clearer, and little by little memory awoke; but, alas! with it came terror.

As he gradually recalled his last interview with Lady Villebois, and all the danger of his position, a faint reflex of the old spirit woke in him. Sybil saw the light kindle in his eyes, and rejoiced thereat. Her father would soon be strong again, and their lives would flow on in the even current of former days, with this difference only—she would never again be afraid of him, never suffer him to keep her at arm's length. The ill-wind of his illness had brought her this good, at least; it had broken down the iron fence of reserve behind which Le Marchant had intrenched himself for so long. Sybil's spirits rose, as the dainty little carriage spun briskly along the lanes.

"Don't the ponies go well to-day, papa?" she said, with an approving shake of the reins—"and what beauties they are! I don't believe there is a prettier pair in England."

Le Marchant made no answer; his eyes were troubled as they rested on his daughter's face.

"Sybil," he said, abruptly, "is your wedding-day fixed yet?"

The girl seemed startled by the suddenness of the question, for a vivid color came into her cheeks, and she averted her eyes.

"Yes, papa," she said, in a low voice.

"When is it?" he pursued, with eager interest—"soon?"

"Oh, papa, do you want to be rid of me?" she said, turning a reproachful glance on him. All her gayety had forsaken her; she was pale, and her eyes had a wistful sadness in them.

"No, child, of course not," he answered, irritably. "I shall miss you very much, but—"

"But you don't want to stand in the way of my happi-

ness—is that what you mean, papa?" she said, with a somewhat melancholy smile, as he paused.

"Perhaps so," he returned, looking at her keenly. "I shall be glad to know that your future is assured."

Sybil arched her dark brows and shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, yes," she assented, indifferently. "The wedding is to be next month, on the twelfth—that is, if you are better."

"It need not be postponed a second time on my account. Has Ormerod been over to the Towers lately?" he asked, after a brief silence.

"Not very lately; he has been so busy at Compton Magna."

"He should have made time to come. Atherstone, who has to travel nearly a hundred miles, contrives to find time to visit us," he retorted, querulously.

"Mr. Atherstone is a doctor, you know, papa, though he does not practice," she remarked, smiling; "his visits are of a semi-professional nature."

"He is a good fellow, doctor or no doctor. I like him. I believe he has saved my life. That blundering old idiot Ernstone would have let me die."

"Mr. Atherstone is very kind," said Sybil, drooping her dark lashes. And then she relapsed into silence.

Le Marchant also pursued his reflections: the almost lethargic passivity he had shown of late was slowly giving place to a haunting terror that something would yet occur to break off Sybil's marriage. If Lady Villebois fulfilled her threat, if ruin and disgrace were shortly to be his portion, it would be some alleviation to him to know that Sybil was sheltered from the storm. Her tender care of him had won the girl a place in her father's callous, worldly heart. If Lady Villebois would only hold her hand until Sybil was Ormerod's wife, he would be content. After that, the deluge might come. He was growing strangely indifferent about his own future. On his wife's account he troubled himself not one whit. He had a half-indulgent, half-pitying contempt for her weakness and vanity. He had probed her selfish nature to the core,

and found there no grain of love for himself. He knew she feared him, and her entire submission deepened his contempt for her almost to dislike. There was a strong spice of the tyrant in his character, but, like many other tyrants, he preferred women of stronger mental fiber chiefly because it gave him more satisfaction to dominate them. To conquer a flaccid creature like his wife was at best a poor triumph. To have first won and then tamed the proud heart of Catherine Dallas would have given him infinite pleasure.

It was strange how vividly the memory of that early love returned to him in the days of his weakness. Long forgotten incidents of his youth were faithfully recalled to the minutest details. During those long hours when he sat in his deep arm-chair by the fireside, to all appearance half-asleep, he lived his life over again. The humiliations of his boyhood; the poverty and bitterness of soul he had known in early manhood; his mother's patient face; blustering, swaggering Jack Le Marchant coming home with flushed cheeks and glittering, restless eyes, after a bad night at roulette . . . He remembered it all with terrible distinctness. Then came the second phase in his career—his life under his uncle's roof, and his desperate determination to rehabilitate himself by marrying his cousin. What an easy road to fortune and happiness it had seemed, and how full of pitfalls it proved! So he had gone on dreaming of the past, instead of bracing himself to meet the new dangers in his path. Whither would that path lead him ultimately? The end was not yet.

In certain moods, when his mind was full of these memories, he was tempted to tell Sybil everything. What a relief it would be to fling caution to the winds; to lift the flood-gates of silence and let the whole tide of bitter waters out! One of these moods was on him now. He turned suddenly, and looked in Sybil's face. She, too, seemed thoughtful, and rather sad, for her rosy lips had a meditative droop at the corners, and her eyes were fixed absently on the ponies' well-groomed haunches. It is just possible that she was also occupied in reviewing the

events of her short life. Even youth is sometimes retrospective.

"Sybil," he began. There was a vibrating something in his tone that startled her into attention. She turned to him with an inquiring expression on her charming face. But, like many another possible confidence, Le Marchant's only reached the initial stage. Something in the girl's eyes checked him, and the wish for any outpouring of heart passed. Sybil would never understand the full significance of his past; she would never comprehend how slowly, almost imperceptibly, he had drifted into ruin; how the desire to rise—that desire which has spurred many a man to do noble deeds—had only prompted him to ignoble ends. No; it was as impossible to tell Sybil anything about the past as it was to tell her of the existence of a danger of which he had at last realized the full extent. No; he could not tell her. Things must drift on as Fate chose. His physical weakness was answerable for these yearnings to confide in some one. He must conquer those yearnings.

"Yes, papa," said the girl, gently, as he paused.

"Sybil, I should like to see Mr. Atherstone this afternoon. Could you send him a telegram?"

A sudden thought had struck him. The impulse to confide in Sybil had been checked, but, instead of dying out, it had rebounded. He would see Atherstone, swear him to silence, and lay the whole case before him.

"Oh! yes, papa, certainly; and I am sure he would come at once. I will stop at the post-office as we go back through the village, and send off the telegram at once."

"He would be able to catch the three o'clock train from Euston, in that case," added Le Marchant, with more eagerness than he had shown since his illness.

"Yes. But, papa, you look so much better, I am sure Mr. Atherstone will wonder why you have sent for him," she added, smiling.

"I am better—much better," assented Le Marchant; "but I don't think he will wonder long."

CHAPTER IV.

ATHERSTONE AT THE HELM.

So it was that Atherstone, sitting at his writing-table in his quiet lodgings in Kensington, was suddenly summoned to Dallas Towers. As he read Sybil's telegram, a curious smile played about his lips. He was glad and at the same time reluctant to obey the summons. He knew that these frequent visits to the Towers only fanned a flame it was his duty to extinguish. His love for Sybil had strengthened of late, partly because she was more charming than ever in the character of nurse—for a woman is never seen to such advantage as when engaged in the ministry of the sickroom—partly because his love was so utterly hopeless. The unattainable is always more desired than the attainable. The sweetest roses and the ripest peaches always grow just out of reach.

Love, however, had done one good thing for Atherstone. It had roused him from the careless, happy-go-lucky state of mind in which he had returned to England. He resolved to be an idler and a cumberer of the soil no longer. With the wish for work, work came—unfortunately, not always a natural sequence. An old college friend had recently been appointed to the editorship of the *Rhadamanthine Review*. John Methuen had always believed in Atherstone, and was still confident that there existed in him a vein of genuine metal, though it had never been rightly worked.

"My dear fellow," he said, "it is part of my business to unearth hidden talent. Join the fraternity of letters—the only true Republic. There is always room for men with the right stuff in them. Now I am certain there is a fair amount of that commodity in you, only you will persist in hiding it carefully out of sight. What is the good of wrapping your talent up in a napkin? Look here, I'll give you a fortnight to write me an article for the *Rhadamanthine*. Choose your own subject and send it to me. Come, is it a bargain?"

It was. Atherstone chose for his subject, "The true

relation of mind and matter." It was an ambitious choice, but a fortunate one. The theories he enunciated were remarkable for novelty and common sense, and the article attracted a good deal of attention in quarters where attention is not easily gained. Encouraged by this success, Atherstone threw himself with ardor into other literary work. Methuen was delighted. Not only had he enlisted a new and promising recruit, but he had also done his old friend a genuine service. Steady work was just what Atherstone needed at that time. It kept him from eating his heart out in idleness—it kept him from brooding on the unfortunate combination of circumstances which had placed him in the antithetical position of Le Marchant's unknown enemy and assiduous friend.

His frequent visits to Dallas Towers were due to a variety of motives. At the time of Le Marchant's seizure, it had devolved on him, as the nearest available medical man, to render what assistance he could. The case interested him, and as Le Marchant constantly averred that the local practitioner, Ernstone, did him more harm than good, Atherstone kept a sort of friendly supervision over that functionary. Le Marchant had taken a liking to Ralph, and always seemed glad to see him, though he said very little. Of course it would have been much wiser in Atherstone to go steadily on with his work and keep away from Dallas Towers—and Sybil; for he did not deceive himself: he knew that the strongest motive which drew him there was the desire to see that charming girl.

But the best of us are prone to error. We leave undone those things which we ought to do, and do those things which we ought not to do. And so it will probably be to the end of the chapter—or until the coming of the Millennium. Instead of telegraphing an excuse to Sybil and going on with his article, Atherstone dispatched a message promising to be at Dallas Towers that afternoon, locked up the unfinished MS., put himself into a hansom, and was driven rapidly to Euston Station.

On arriving at Dallas Towers, he was at once ushered into Le Marchant's presence.

"You sent for me, and here I am," he said, cheerfully, when they had greeted each other. "I hope, however, I have not been summoned in my character of doctor."

"I wanted to talk to you," replied the other, curtly.

Atherstone looked at him in some surprise. In health, Le Marchant was certainly better. The dreamy introspective expression that had clouded his glance was gone, his eyes had something of the keenness and fire of former days. The only indication of shaken health was the nervous movement of his long, thin hands as he restlessly fingered an ivory paper-cutter which he had taken from the table at his elbow.

The two men were alone in the library. Sybil was not at her usual post, and Atherstone glanced round the room in search of her with a look of disappointment.

"Miss Le Marchant is well, I hope," he ventured at last, as the other seemed indisposed to pursue the conversation.

"Oh, yes," answered Le Marchant, impatiently. "You will see her at dinner. I asked her to withdraw, as I wished to speak to you alone."

"Yes," assented Ralph, absently. An uncomfortable foreboding stole over him that Mr. Le Marchant's confidences would place him in new difficulties. He seemed fated to be a repository for other people's secret troubles.

"Before I begin, will you give me your word not to divulge anything I may tell you?"

Atherstone's heart sank like a stone. Le Marchant's manner seemed to imply that the confidence about to be reposed in him was of a damaging, possibly an incriminating, nature. If so, would he be justified in keeping silence? If Lady Villebois carried out her threat of instituting legal proceedings against Le Marchant, and he, Atherstone, was compelled to give evidence in support of Miss Lowry's case, the pledge he was now asked to give might weigh like a mill-stone about his neck. Le Marchant looked surprised at his hesitation.

"Surely it is a very simple thing to ask. I would do as much for you, Atherstone."

"Very well, I promise," was the reluctant answer.

"I am placed in a position of great difficulty, of possible peril," began Le Marchant, bending the paper-knife with his restless fingers and fixing an eager glance on the other's face. "I want to ask your advice on a matter which concerns my daughter as well as myself."

Atherstone started and changed color. A hope woke in him that possibly Le Marchant might be about to consult him on some business matter only. But this hope died out with his next words.

"I daresay you will blame my conduct very severely," went on Le Marchant, with a touch of his old irony; "men who have never been tempted are apt to be severe on men who have—especially when they have succumbed to the temptation. What I did was wrong, no doubt, but it seemed to me excusable—and, after all, who can justly define what is right and what is wrong? I have been a good landlord; the Dallas estates are well-managed; the farmers who rent the land grumble less than most farmers; and the laborers are housed infinitely better than they were in my uncle's time. I think if I had to live my life over again I should not act differently."

"You would destroy Mr. Dallas' will again?"

The cool question had an electrical effect on Le Marchant. He sprang to his feet with an oath, and clutched the paper-knife as if it had been a dagger. The glitter of his eyes and the convulsive twitching of his lips alarmed Atherstone. He had been unwise to rouse thus a man over whose head hung the Damocles sword of paralysis.

"Come, Le Marchant," he said, rising and laying his hand on the other's shoulder. "You are not going to stab me with that paper-cutter."

He took the harmless ivory toy from him and put it back on the table.

"You were going to tell me a secret. I have suspected it these two months. I know it now."

"Who—told—you?"

The words dropped painfully and slowly from his working lips.

"Lady Villebois told me something; but I have stronger proofs than any she could give."

"You have proofs—you—what do *you* know about it?"

"I witnessed the will you destroyed."

"You witnessed the will?" he repeated, stupidly.

"Yes."

There was a moment's silence. The two men looked each other full in the eyes. Both were very pale. Atherstone's face was stern, and there was a light in his eyes which made the other wince. He read contempt and condemnation in that steady glance.

"Did you send for me only to tell me this?" said Atherstone at last.

"I don't understand you," muttered Le Marchant, averting his eyes. "I have told you nothing. You are taking things for granted in an unwarrantable manner."

"Come! No verbal fencing. It is useless to attempt any evasion with me. I tell you I know everything!"

"How long have you known it—whatever it is?"

"Since the day before your illness."

"And yet you have come here, ostensibly as my friend!"

"I have no wish to be your enemy—even now."

"Then you must be my friend; you cannot be neutral," exclaimed Le Marchant, eagerly. "Will you keep silent? Will you remain passive? I ask no more. Lady Villebois is powerless without you. Come," he went on, with growing excitement, "it is not much to ask. It involves no sacrifice on your part. Leave England until this has blown over. Lady Villebois is an old woman; she cannot live forever. I do not fear Miss Lowry."

"Stop! Do you know that you are asking me to become your accomplice in this fraud?"

"Fraud! Nonsense! You are too squeamish. I will make it worth your while to absent yourself from England for a few years. Come, name your sum. I am a rich man—and I can be generous. A few thousands more or less won't make much difference to me."

In offering this shameless, coarsely-worded bribe, Le Marchant betrayed a lamentable want of discrimination. Atherstone was not a man to be insulted with impunity;

certainly not a man to be bought. For a moment, he stared at him as though he distrusted the evidence of his ears. Could it be that Le Marchant—Sybil's father—was so sunk in the mire of fraud and falsehood that he disbelieved in the existence of honor in others?

"You wish to bribe me into silence," said Atherstone, with a hard ring in his voice. "I thank you for the compliment you pay me—but I beg to decline this flattering offer," he added, ironically.

"Then what do you mean to do?" retorted the other. He was too desperate to heed sarcasm. "Do you mean to ruin me? Do you want to drive me mad?"

"On the contrary, I wish to help you, if I can."

A ray of eager hope shot into Le Marchant's eyes. After all, things might arrange themselves. If Atherstone could be persuaded or cajoled into concealing what he knew, all would be well. Had he known the powerful weapon that lay ready to his hand, he would have used it without compunction. But, acute as he was in matters of business, he was often singularly dull in affairs of subtler nature. It had not entered into his calculations that Atherstone loved Sybil; that his friendly attentions to himself were entirely due to his daughter's influence. Had he known it, he would have appealed to Atherstone's love instead of to his self-interest. As it was, he worked according to his lights. Money was his deity; he could imagine none more powerful.

"You will help me?" he queried, sharply. "I am glad to see you are reasonable. I have said I can be generous; I—"

"You misunderstand me, Mr. Le Marchant," he interrupted, haughtily. "Once and for all I refuse any bribe. In offering it, you insult me and degrade yourself."

"I assure you I did not intend an insult," said Le Marchant, deprecatingly. "I thought—"

"Never mind what you thought. I repeat that I am willing to help you if I can. But my help must be given in my own way. As matters stand now, your position is this: If Lady Villebois establishes her case against you—as in all probability she will—you will be convicted of a

fraud of a peculiarly ugly nature. You will be ruined not only financially but socially, and your wife and daughter will be ruined with you."

"You are frank!" ejaculated the other, dryly.

"Yes; it is better to be frank in such a case as this. Now, I hope that by appealing, not to Lady Villebois, for I believe her to be inflexible—"

"Confound her!" muttered Le Marchant, under his breath.

"But I am certain Miss Lowry would be generous," Atherstone went on, disregarding the interruption. "She is a noble creature—she cares little, I imagine, for wealth or position."

"You think she might be induced to forego her claim?"

"I should not advise her to do anything so quixotic—and Lady Villebois would scout such an idea."

"Then what *do* you mean? How are you going to mediate between us?" cried the other, feverishly.

"I think a compromise might be effected. Lawsuits never do an estate any good. The lawyers' bill would be heavy, especially if—as Miss Lowry is not yet of age—the estate were thrown into Chancery."

"Compromise! *I* won't yield an inch. Possession is nine points of the law. I defy Lady Villebois and Miss Lowry and all their works. I will never give up my claim to the estates."

"Then the matter is at an end. You say you will not yield: then I can do nothing. Miss Lowry is a generous woman, but her generosity must not be abused."

"You seem to be her champion," sneered Le Marchant. "Perhaps you have a personal interest in establishing her claim. You mean to marry her."

Atherstone's lip curled. The coarse innuendo disgusted rather than angered him. With all his cleverness, what a contemptible creature Le Marchant was! Illness had weakened him physically; his daughter's loving tendence had softened him in a manner, but the old Adam was latent in him still. What a mystery it seemed that a being of such ignoble impulses could be the father of a pure, kindly-hearted girl like Sybil!

"Miss Lowry," resumed Atherstone, purposely ignoring the other's words, "has none but friendly feelings for your daughter. It would pain her to know that any reflection of *your* wrongdoing should fall on an innocent head. I believe—nay, I am sure she would be merciful if you appealed for mercy. But, understand, I will not be a party to any injustice. Miss Lowry must know everything; you must tell her how you have defrauded her."

"And if I refuse?"

"You must take the consequences. But, if you are wise, you will follow the course I have pointed out. A compromise is the best thing you can hope for. If you had to do with Lady Villebois only, you would most likely fail to win any concession whatever. But Miss Lowry is neither hard nor revengeful. For your daughter's sake, she will be willing to spare you. The exposure you have so much reason to dread may be averted, but Dallas Towers must be given up to its rightful owner."

"And I am to leave it a beggar, I suppose?" queried the other, bitterly.

"Did Mr. Dallas make any provision for you in the will you destroyed?"

"Yes; a beggarly pittance of ten thousand or so."

"You call that a pittance!"

"It is, compared with twenty thousand a year—my present income."

"You preferred dishonesty and twenty thousand a year to honesty and five hundred a year?"

"I did; and many a man standing well with the world has thought and thinks the same—only he has not broken the eleventh commandment: he has never been found out."

"I daresay Miss Lowry would give up ten thousand to you," pursued Atherstone, coldly; "perhaps she might increase the sum, for she is generous. In point of law you would have no claim on her whatever. The fact that Mr. Dallas made a second will invalidates that under which you inherited; and, as this second will was de-

stroyed by you, he died practically intestate, and Miss Lowry is sole heiress."

Le Marchant made no answer; he remained silent and sullen for some moments. He knew Atherstone's words were terribly true—if the existence of this second will could be proved, he would forfeit even the "pittance" he despised. Vivien, as her grandfather's next of kin, would claim every acre of the estate, every shilling of James Dallas' wealth. He mentally weighed the pros and cons of Atherstone's plan. Such a compromise, if it could be effected, would take the sting of shame from his ruin, and yet he hated to yield. He longed to fight the matter out to the end, and win or lose all.

But the indomitable will, the never-flagging energy of his early manhood, were broken and spent; his physical powers had been severely taxed by the discussion, and some degree of reaction made itself felt as he lay back in his easy-chair. The listlessness of bodily weakness stole over him and dulled the keen brain of the man. Oh! for one hour of youth and strength and courage—for the power to scheme, plot, conquer, as of old! But no; the wearied brain refused to work, the overstrained nerves gave way. He felt beaten, world-weary, hopeless. Physical weakness did what all Atherstone's arguments had failed to do. It convinced him that he was beaten at last. A sense of powerlessness, of utter failure, swept over him. He bent his head as if under the lash and fury of a hail-storm.

Hiding his face in his hands, he burst into tears. Atherstone was shocked. Tears—even facile, feminine tears—always touched him; but to see a man of Le Marchant's hard and inflexible nature crying with the abandonment of a child was terrible.

"Le Marchant, for God's sake don't do that!" he exclaimed, starting up and laying his hand on the quivering shoulder of the man. "Some one may come in—your daughter may hear you."

"Let her!" sobbed the broken creature, "I don't care. You have ruined me between you all—why don't you

finish the business? It would be a charity to put a pistol to my head. I'll do it myself, if—"

"Come," said Atherstone, sternly—he knew he must be firm; "no threats of that sort. Be a man. Make what reparation you can to Miss Lowry for the injury you have done her, and—"

"Do you think that meddling old woman, Lady Villebois, will keep quiet until after Sybil's wedding?" interrupted Le Marchant, jumping to another subject with feminine inconsequence.

It seemed as if with a woman's tears he had adopted some of her erratic methods of thought.

A shade crossed Atherstone's brow as he looked down at the speaker. His thin, sunken features, his reddened eyes, his twitching lips told not only of physical decadence but of failing mental power. Le Marchant, broken in health and shattered in nerve, appealed to his pity. But this question, though put with childish irritability, touched him yet more deeply.

Despicable as he was, this hardened sinner had some love for his child. However painful to himself this allusion to Sybil's marriage might be, he understood and applauded the motive that prompted it.

"When is the wedding to be?" he asked, in a low voice.

"Next month—on the twelfth, I believe."

"I do not think Lady Villebois is likely to take any important step just yet. But I will call on her to-morrow if you like, and—"

"No, no," interrupted the other, hastily; "leave it to chance. Better not let her know how anxious I am to get Sybil safely married. Lady Villebois is a malicious old woman; she might do something to break off the marriage—she might tell Ormerod that Sybil is no longer an heiress," he added, with a cunning smile.

Atherstone's dark eyes flashed on him a look of unspeakable contempt.

"Is it possible you think Ormerod capable of breaking off the match for such a cause?" he exclaimed.

"I do—most men would."

"Then let me tell you that you misunderstand him completely. He would be incapable of such meanness."

"It would be better not to put him to the test."

Before Atherstone could utter the retort which rose to his lips the door opened, and Sybil advanced to greet him with outstretched hand, a bright smile of welcome on her lips and in her eyes.

CHAPTER V.

KISMET.

THE ensuing weeks passed quickly for Sybil. The monotonous days slipped away as uneventful and colorless days are apt to slip—unheeded and uncounted.

Mrs. Le Marchant lived in a paradise of millinery. It gave her real pleasure to choose silks, handle laces, and study the effects of color and drapery. Sybil had never before seemed so important in her mother's eyes, because her approaching marriage involved the purchase of a trousseau and gave Mrs. Le Marchant an excuse for spending much time and more money in providing her daughter with a superfluity of wearing apparel.

What maternal affection was latent in Selina's bosom manifested itself to the full during those weeks of preparation. On Sybil's behalf she exerted the unerring taste and judgment she undoubtedly possessed in matters of the toilet. She spent hours of anxious thought in planning effective morning, dinner, and ball dresses. She wrote long letters of directions to a certain high priestess of fashion whose skill was equally great in devising a gown, or in piling up etceteras into a mountainous sum-total at which husbands and fathers stood aghast. She made numerous journeys to town and ransacked the shops in Bond Street, exhausting the patience of many a long-suffering *demoiselle* or *damoiseau de comptoir* as she turned over the shining satins and delicate laces her soul loved. No Parisienne was ever harder to please. Her quick eye detected at a glance any defect in tint, form, or substance in silk or satin, velvet or

gauze. She was an artist in her way, and an ill-matching end of ribbon, a badly-cut boot or glove, an ungraceful drapery or ill-chosen combination of color gave her absolute pain, and not infrequently roused a righteous anger in her breast.

Sybil always excused herself from accompanying Mrs. Le Marchant on these expeditions. Shopping tired and did not interest her. "She would rather leave everything to her mother. Papa would miss her." The latter plea was frequently urged, and Selina never expostulated when it was offered. A vague fear sometimes troubled her that, when Sybil was married, on her own shoulders would fall the burden of waiting on the invalid. If Bernard entertained any such idea, it must instantly be nipped in the bud; meanwhile, as Sybil appeared quite content to devote herself to her father's service, it was better to let her have her own way.

Sybil sometimes vexed her mother by the indifference she displayed about this absorbing business of the trousseau. Whenever, in a moment of expansion, Selina described some of the marvels then in process of construction, the girl smiled and seemed to listen, but her eyes had a preoccupied, far-away look that betrayed her lack of interest in the subject.

That grave, abstracted expression was very often seen on her face during those dull, autumn days. When alone in her own sitting-room she would sit quiet and thoughtful by the fireside with her hands clasped idly on her lap, and her eyes fixed dreamily on the red embers. An observant spectator—had one been present—would have detected a wistful sadness in those beautiful, dark-fringed eyes. Poor child! Her life was very isolated just then, and her nature was not strong enough to bear either solitude or the weight of unshared anxieties that oppressed her. She would not admit even to herself that she was disappointed in Felix, but so it was. Her engagement had not brought her the full and perfect joy of which she had dreamed. Felix was so altered in manner: he looked stern and cold, he spoke so little to her when he came to the Towers. He was quite unlike his

old self. When they were married, would he always be grave, always wrapped up in politics? How often she longed to pour out her heart to Vivien!—the friend who had vanished so mysteriously from her ken. How she longed to confide to her the doubts and fears that haunted her!

But time went inexorably on. The days and weeks drifted by, and the eve of her wedding-day found her still in a passive state of vague regret and disappointment. Ormerod was staying at Compton Magna. He had ridden over to the Towers that morning, and his manner and look chilled her to the heart. She shrank from him when he kissed her at parting, and a look of fear came into her eyes. When he had gone, she shut herself in her own room and sat there still and cold as a statute all the afternoon. She did not cry; there was a dull, aching pain in her bosom, but the relief of tears did not come. Twilight wrapped the room in shadow; still she sat on with that statue-like immobility of lip and eye—the outward sign of the death-like coldness at her heart—transforming her soft, childish features into a mask of marble. A strange numbness crept over her. Life, movement, the power to feel seemed leaving her. The touch of Ormerod's lips on her forehead had frozen all the blood in her veins. Her hands were icy cold, but she made no movement to warm them. A bright fire burned cheerfully in the grate, but she did not approach it: she had no desire for warmth. She sat on the sofa at the foot of the bed, moveless, almost pulseless, the whiteness of her face and hands accentuated by the dark, warm color of her gown. Darkness came, and found her still there in the same attitude. The room was very quiet, only the sound of falling cinders from the dying fire broke the silence; the white drapery of the bed looked ghostly in the dim light; her figure was indistinctly reflected in the long mirror, which caught a feeble ray from the low, red, flameless fire, and threw a shimmer of light on her white face.

At last the death-like hush was broken. The dressing-gong sounded, and her maid knocked softly at the door. Sybil rose mechanically, and unlocked it. "She looked,

for all the world, as if she was walking in her sleep," was the maid's subsequent comment on her young mistress' manner during the performance of her evening toilet. Her curly locks were carefully arranged by the abigail's skillful fingers; the white dinner-dress was donned, the betrothal pearls were clasped round her white throat, but she never vouchsafed a single glance at the mirror, or spoke a word to the maid, who watched her with the mingled curiosity and sympathy peculiar to her class.

As Sybil glided noiselessly along the wide corridor, and down the broad staircase, she looked more like a spirit than a maiden of mortal mold. Her delicate features seemed to have a purer outline than of old; her skin had lost its fresh and flower-like bloom—its present ivory pallor was as beautiful in its way, but the change gave a certain pathos to her aspect; an expression not easy to read shone in the depths of her dark, dilated eyes. All that evening she was silent and abstracted, answering briefly, in a low voice, when addressed, but otherwise taking no part in the conversation.

Atherstone was the only guest staying at the Towers for the wedding: he was there by the special desire of its master. Had Mrs. Le Marchant been allowed *carte blanche*, she would have filled the house with her relations and friends; but Dr. Ernstone and Atherstone put their veto upon anything that might disturb or excite their patient. The wedding was to be a very quiet one. There were to be no bridesmaids, for, as Sybil could not have the bridesmaid of her choice (*i.e.*, Vivien), she resolved to dispense with the attendance of the customary bevy of matrimonial aspirants.

Atherstone watched Sybil closely that evening. Her manner puzzled him a good deal. His love for her was curiously free from any alloy of selfishness; her happiness was far dearer to him than his own. But, after all, he was only human. He could not repress some jealous pangs, some rebellious murmurings against Fate as he watched her sweet, pale, wistful face. He loved her. She was dearer to him than the life which animated his

beating heart. Did Ormerod love her as *he* loved her? Would Ormerod cherish her with the faithful, protective tenderness *he* would fold round her like a warm-lined mantle, shielding her from the chill storms of life?

"Ah, Sybil, if to-morrow were to see you *my* wife, I would bring a smile to your sweet lips, a light into your beautiful eyes, for I love you so much that I would make you love me!" he thought, as he watched her sitting silent and stirless by her father's chair in the library after dinner.

Yes, it was a thousand pities Fate had so wofully tangled her threads in weaving the web of his and Sybil's life. Atherstone was born to be a model Benedict. He would have made any reasonable woman happy, and the love of a gentle, warm-hearted girl like Sybil would have opened to him a new world of joy. Rooted in the rich soil of a quiet, contented domestic life, his vigorous, virile character would have put forth a thousand gracious blossoms. Wife and children would have been to him like sunshine and soft air, smoothing away any acerbities or harshnesses of manner, and rousing all the tenderness dormant under his somewhat rugged exterior.

But it was not to be. Sybil—his pearl of maidenhood—was not for him. Well, he must be content to see that priceless pearl given to one more worthy to win and wear it.

But, in spite of a night spent in a struggle to battle down Love and win the calm of Philosophy, it was difficult to seem, impossible to feel, stoical when he stood, with Ormerod, waiting the bride's arrival in the church. It had been difficult to shake his friend's hand that morning and wish him happiness, but he had done it.

Ormerod bore himself well during those moments (trying to the nerves of the hardiest) when the expectant and presumably happy bridegroom stands and faces the critical glances of a congregation assembled to see two human beings swear mutual fidelity until death parts them. The church was well filled, for, though the number of wedding guests was limited to a dozen of Mrs. Le Marchant's "dearest friends," every one within driving dis-

tance had come to see pretty Sybil married. Ormerod seemed quite indifferent to the scrutiny of the hundred or more pairs of eyes bent on him; he was neither flushed nor flurried. He was pale, cool, and perfectly composed. No nervous twitch of lip or quiver of eyelid betrayed whatever feelings stirred him.

It was Atherstone who manifested symptoms of mental perturbation. He was evidently uneasy; he fingered the gardenia in his button-hole, fidgeted nervously with his gloves and handkerchief, and. finally, dropped his prayer-book with a crash just as a glimmer of white at the open church door told of the bride's arrival. For a moment he lost his head; the church, with its curious, expectant, whispering congregation, seemed to swim round him; the low, sibilant hum of hushed feminine tones sounded like the ominous murmur of a storm-wind that will presently rise into a wild shriek of fury. Then a sudden desperate calmness came to him; he brushed his lips with his handkerchief to hide their twitching; he looked up. His eyes fastened eagerly on the slow-moving white cloud gliding slowly toward him by Le Marchant's side.

Sybil had looked spirit-like on the previous evening; she seemed ethereal as a phantom now. Her face was as white as her gown, her dark-lashed lids were drooped over her eyes, her lips were colorless, and folded close in an expression rarely seen on living lips—the dead only have that set and passive calm.

A horrible idea flashed through Atherstone's brain. Sybil—his sweet Sybil was dead; this moving statue was not his bright, sweet-faced love, his pearl of price; her soul had fled, and they were bringing the empty casket to give as a specter-bride to his friend. The bridal orange-blossoms were the "maiden strewments" of a virgin corpse; the bridal veil was a shroud; those fixed marble features were not the features of a living bride, but of a dead girl. No pulse of life beat in that shrouded form; those heavy eyelids were shut forever, those pale lips were sealed in eternal silence.

The mild, carefully-modulated tones of the rector's voice enunciating the opening sentences of the marriage

service roused him from this nightmare-vision of death to a reality almost as terrible. The supreme moment had come. The irrevocable words were to be spoken. The woman he loved lived, but from that hour she would be dead to him. That wild fancy of his was typical of the life-long severance soon to be decreed between them. He was powerless to stop the relentless march of events. He could only watch and wait.

His keen glance traveled rapidly over the group on which all eyes were centered: the bride and bridegroom, Le Marchant and the officiating clergyman. Mrs. Le Marchant, magnificent in mauve velvet, stood a few paces from her husband looking serenely elegant, placidly content with herself and all the world. Sybil's dress pleased her artistic eye; there was not a single fold of drapery awry, not a flower too much, not a deficiency anywhere. Madame Maude had surpassed herself; the trousseau was a success, and the wedding-gown was its crowning triumph. Selina's cup of happiness was full to the brim.

Ormerod's face was calm, impassible, almost stern.

After one quick glance at his pale bride, as she moved forward on her father's arm to take up her position at his side, he averted his eyes and appeared quietly indifferent as the rector's monotonous voice uttered the solemn words of the charge.

Le Marchant's aspect told of suppressed excitement—so much Atherstone saw at a glance; but, his attention once arrested, he watched him with absorbing interest. Never had he seen a face expressing such intensity of purpose: every muscle seemed braced to composure by sheer force of will. His eyes had a fierce, fixed brightness, his sallow cheeks were flushed, his lips tense, his thin figure was held stiffly erect. He followed the service with eager attention, shooting a piercing glance at Ormerod as the fateful question was asked, "Would he have this woman to be his wedded wife?" For a moment their eyes met; Le Marchant's were ardent, uneasy, fearful; Ormerod's tranquil, steady, and coldly contemptuous.

"I will."

The words were spoken clearly, quietly: a half sigh of relief escaped Le Marchant's lips. Then his eyes fastened eagerly on his daughter's marble face, and a dusky flush mounted to his forehead. The question was repeated; there was an instant's pause. The bride looked up with a startled, frightened glance; she seemed to hesitate. It was a moment of vital import, and its full significance dawned at last upon her darkened mind. The icy composure of her manner thawed; her lips trembled, a wave of color swept over her pale face. Her troubled eyes rested on her father's face. No compassion, no tenderness was written on that thin, eager visage; his eyes seemed to pierce her, reading her thoughts and compelling to submission. The whole strength of his will was concentrated in one supreme, all-conquering effort.

Sybil felt its impelling power; a quiver passed over her frame, but she uttered in low and distinct tones the two irrevocable words:

"I will."

"Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?"

Le Marchant stepped forward; he stretched his hand to touch his daughter's; a smile was on his lips—a smile? no, a distortion—a horrible distortion dragging one side of his face in a downward, hideous grimace. The extended hand dropped powerless, the wave of dull red receded from his temples, his thin figure swayed—then fell prone, senseless, sightless at the bride's feet. The sword had fallen.

Mrs. Le Marchant uttered a faint cry and buried her face in her lace handkerchief; Sybil, sick with terror, but too brave and perhaps too overwrought to show it, knelt down by her father's prostrate form, and began to loosen his collar and cravat with her trembling fingers. Atherstone, always cool in an emergency, whispered a few reassuring words in her ear, and put her gently aside; Ormerod, roused by the catastrophe to act as became a man in his interesting if trying position, took his bride's hand and begged her in a low voice to leave the stricken man to Atherstone's care. For one terrible moment Sybil thought Death had swept into the church and car-

ried off a victim; her father's face, marred by that disfiguring, mocking grimace, looked ghastly in its livid pallor; but Atherstone's words quickly reassured her, and she passively submitted to be led away.

The rector, whose practical experience had not furnished him with any precedent to serve as guide in the present difficulty, stood mute and motionless with his open book in his hand. What was to be done?—would the sacred rite be completed later on?—who would give away the bride?

Ormerod saw the good man's evident perplexity, and hastened to relieve it.

"The service can go on when Mr. Le Marchant has been removed. Mr. Atherstone, doubtless, will give away the bride," he said, quietly, as he passed him, with Sybil on his arm.

The congregation, however, being unaware of this decision, were on the tip-toe of curiosity. A dozen conjectures were whispered from one to the other. Every one concurred in pronouncing Mr. Le Marchant's seizure an event of evil omen for the young couple. All the young ladies averred that the wedding would certainly be postponed—no girl could have the heart to proceed with the service after so terrible a scene.

Meanwhile the helpless cause of all this commotion was borne into the vestry, where Dr. Ernstone and Atherstone decided that there would be no danger in moving him at once to the Towers. An impromptu couch was arranged for him in one of the carriages that had brought the wedding-party to the church; he was carefully conveyed to his home, undressed, and put to bed, Atherstone tending him with a woman's gentleness.

Ormerod, having seen the carriage depart with its unconscious burden, re-entered the church, and approached Sybil and her mother. The latter had recovered her composure—tears were injurious to her complexion, and a sense of her maternal obligations prompted her to exert her power of self-command. A strong revulsion of feeling was manifest in Sybil. Passive indifference had given place to quiet resolve. There was a firm look

about her lips, a gleam of settled purpose in her large eyes. As Ormerod looked at her, he was conscious of the change, and, strange to say, he never admired her more or liked her better than at that moment.

"Are you ready, Sybil?" he inquired, offering his arm to lead her to her place. The rector, still standing in the chancel, book in hand, glanced inquiringly round in search of Atherstone. His former perplexity returned. Some one must give away the bride; failing Atherstone, who could be pressed into the service?

Sybil rose and took Ormerod's proffered arm, whispering as she did so:

"Yes, I am ready—quite ready to go home—to my father."

"You wish the wedding to be put off?"

"Yes."

Ormerod turned to Mrs. Le Marchant, and hurriedly informed her of Sybil's decision.

"My dear child," expostulated that lady, in a reproachful whisper, "do be reasonable. Why should the wedding be put off?—your father is in no danger. Think how people will talk!"

"My mind is made up, mamma," Sybil answered, calmly. "Mr. Gregory," she added, turning to the rector, "there will be no wedding to-day—I refuse to go on with the service."

Mrs. Le Marchant was at her wit's end. What was to be done? Here was Sybil—the usually docile Sybil—asserting herself in an unexpected manner; calmly ignoring her wishes and disregarding her advice, and making her, Selina Le Marchant, ridiculous in the eyes of all her friends and acquaintances! This *mariage rompu* was a serious social disaster; it would be the talk of the coun-

ty for months, and she would have to endure her friends' half-ironic compassion and evade the awkward questions they would shower on her with what skill she might. Was ever woman so unlucky as she! Many anxious hours had been spent in arranging this wedding, in planning this ungrateful girl's trousseau: she had unselfishly devoted her best energies to Sybil's service only to meet with this cruel vexation. The wedding once postponed, who could say when it might come off? Selina, as we know, had her own reasons for desiring to see her daughter married and out of the way.

"I am sorry to vex you, mamma," said Sybil, seeing her mother's disappointment and guessing its cause. "I will explain everything to Felix when we get home."

"If you are obstinate, Sybil, I suppose you must have your own way," was her cross answer. "Let us get away from the church; every one is staring at us."

The eyes of the congregation followed them curiously as they retreated into the vestry—not for worlds would Mrs. Le Marchant have braved the fuller publicity of the aisle. In total silence they were driven to the Towers. Ormerod watched Sybil with new interest—she no longer seemed a cipher; there was a womanly self-possession about her that impressed him powerfully. She had lived through the crucial moment where "brook and river meet"—the brooklet of girlhood had passed into the "river's broad expanse," the "deep, still, gliding stream" of womanhood. That brave, steady light still shone in her eyes, awing even her mother into quiescence. Her manner was calm, her child-like features placid, no sign of weakness was visible in her: she looked like a woman whose mind is fully made up.

The long avenue seemed interminable to Ormerod, as

they drove toward the Towers, but the house was reached at last. Atherstone met them at the entrance. He looked pale and worn.

"How is my father?" inquired Sybil.

"He is still unconscious, but, I believe, in no actual danger," answered Ralph, in a low voice. "Congratulations, no doubt, will seem out of place just now," he added, glancing at the supposed bride and bridegroom, "but accept mine. I wish you both every happiness."

"Thank you," said Ormerod, dryly; "but the congratulations are premature. We are not married yet."

"Not married!" repeated Atherstone, in amazement.

"No; the wedding has been postponed."

A faint color rose on Sybil's cheeks, and her eyes were bent on the ground as she passed on toward the great drawing-room. Ormerod followed her in silence, leaving Mrs. Le Marchant to explain matters as she chose to Ralph.

The drawing-room was bright with blazing fires and perfumed with the rich but sickly sweetness of tuberoses and stephanotis, for the hothouses had been pillaged to deck the house for the wedding. Ormerod closed the door and went up to Sybil, who stood calm and erect near one of the long windows, looking out on the gray sky, the leafless trees, and the green sweep of turf. As he approached, she turned and looked full at him.

"Felix," she said, holding out her hand—there was a tinge of regal stateliness in the gesture that was strangely at variance with the child-like grace he had always associated with his pretty, silly little Sybil—"Felix, you and I have been saved from a great sorrow—from a great sin this morning," she said, hesitating as if the words did not come easily; "we have both made a mistake—for

weeks I have *felt* you did not love me; I only *knew* it yesterday."

"I would have tried to make you happy," he answered, in a low, unsteady voice, taking her offered hand in his. He attempted no denial of her words; he could not juggle with the truth while her clear eyes rested on him.

"And you would have been miserable yourself," she rejoined, with a sad smile. "I could not accept such a sacrifice. I give you back your liberty—gladly. No," she added, quickly, as he was about to interrupt her, "I am not so generous as you think. I do not love you, Felix—and—and—" She paused, and the hot color rushed into her face, dyeing it crimson.

"I understand," said Ormerod, bending down and kissing the slender fingers he held; "you love some one else —and I am dismissed."

CHAPTER VI.

CONCLUSION.

LE MARCHANT was moved up to London, ostensibly to be within reach of the best medical advice, but really that Mrs. Le Marchant might be on the spot to oppose the claim made by Lady Villebois on Vivien's behalf. Atherstone had been compelled to take Mrs. Le Marchant into his confidence, as her husband showed no signs of recovery. The time of grace had expired, and Lady Villebois refused to listen to his request for further delay. If Sybil chose to break off her engagement with Mr. Or-

merod, that was, she argued, no reason why the armistice she had charitably granted should be lengthened into a truce. Right was right—she was sorry to hear her worst enemy was placed *hors de combat*, but the lawsuit must commence at once. She and the lawyers were confident of success—nothing now remained but to secure Miss Lowry's formal consent to their plans.

Sybil had some idea that changes of fortune were imminent; her mother had dropped some hints, and Atherstone admitted, when she asked the question in plain terms, that her father might possibly lose some portion of his wealth. Le Marchant himself was dead to all worldly perplexities and cares. This second paralytic stroke had deprived him of all mental as well as physical power. His body was as helpless as that of a week-old infant; his mind feeble to idiocy. Sybil's presence alone brought a faint gleam of intelligence into his vacant eyes; he would try to articulate some word when she approached, but the power of utterance was gone—he could only mutter indistinct sounds which the poor girl made vain efforts to comprehend. It was terrible to her to watch those fruitless struggles for speech, heart-rending to see the look of dog-like affection in his dim eyes as she hung over him with that divine, semi-maternal love felt by most women for creatures dependent on them.

Those winter months spent in a hired house in a quiet square near Hyde Park were to Sybil full of calm, peaceful happiness. After the crisis of that terrible wedding-day—a day which, even now, it pained her to recall—her life flowed uneventfully by, and she was content. Little by little she accustomed herself to the altered relations between her father and herself—his childishness, his helplessness ceased to pain her; she loved him as a

mother loves a sickly deformed infant; she waited on him, tried to amuse him, sung him little crooning songs. In the future was a dim promise of fuller happiness—sometimes her thoughts flew onward to the time when the promise would be fulfilled gloriously. But as she told herself, in the hours when these dreams were brightest, she had so much to learn before she was worthy to share the life of the man she loved—he was so clever, so noble, so altogether above her level. True love is ever humble, and poor little Sybil thought herself hopelessly inferior to the idol she had set up for herself. Many a dry, uninteresting book she plodded through during those winter months; many a weary hour she spent in endeavoring, with the help of a grammar and dictionary, to teach herself Latin—for it seemed to her that a woman who was ignorant of that noble language was entirely unfit to be the wife of a rising author like Ralph Atherstone. She never guessed that her ignorance and utter simplicity were but added charms in his eyes.

Honest Ralph toiled his hardest in the long winter evenings, contriving, however, to snatch an hour or two from his literary labors to devote to Sybil and her helpless charge. He had a definite object in view which marvelously sweetened his work. Poverty was now the only obstacle between him and happiness. Not a word of love had yet been spoken to Sybil, but the two understood each other wonderfully well, and Atherstone felt strong enough and patient enough to conquer any number of difficulties hindering his way to success and fortune.

Ormerod spent the winter in New York, writing regularly to Sybil in spite of *lés convenances*. The General Election in the early spring brought him home with all

speed. Much to his own surprise—for his absence from England had, he supposed, lost him all chance with the electors of Compton Magna—he was returned as the representative of that ancient borough by a small majority. Success at such a time was doubly welcome; a long-cherished ambition was realized, the career he desired above all others opened bright and fair with promise, and a hope was fostered that the future might redeem the past—that a certain grave under a certain cedar-tree might give up its buried treasure—that love would wake from its death-like sleep to deathless immortality.

He resumed his former friendship with Atherstone, and soon discovered who had supplanted him in pretty Sybil's heart. Man-like, he had been for a while just a trifle sore at her defection—he had always been so certain of her loyalty; but he was wise enough to hide his mortification, and soon to be heartily ashamed of it.

April came, with its bright skies and soft airs. The hard, shining buds of the chestnut-trees in Kensington Gardens were bursting, and the delicate, crinkled, fan-shaped leaves felt their way out into the sunshine. The grand old gardens, despised by Fashion, but loved of dreamers, were a very favorite resort of Sybil's on bright mornings, when the yearning for fresh air and sunlight was strong on the country-bred girl. She delighted in the secluded nooks, where nurses and their charges seldom penetrated. She liked to pace along the quiet paths near the Ranger's Lodge, a spot almost as solitary as any in Dallas Park.

One brilliant morning, she betook herself to this favorite resort, with a book in her hand—rather a dry-as-dust book it was, but she had heard Ralph speak of it in com-

mendatory terms, and she resolved to read it religiously through, conscientiously trying her best to understand its metaphysical profundities. The air was so balmy, she thought it would be delightful to take a chair under one of the trees, and there bend all her energies to the task in hand. But she had not read a dozen lines before her eyes were attracted to a figure approaching along the path near her—the figure of a tall woman, dressed very simply in black. Sybil started to her feet, with a little cry of joyful recognition.

"Vivien!" she cried, dropping her book, and hurrying forward, with both hands outstretched. "Oh, Vivien, where have you been hiding all this time?"

Forgetting everything in the joy of seeing her again, Sybil threw her arms round the well-remembered form, and kissed Vivien on both cheeks, much to the edification of a couple of nurse-maids and a baker-boy loitering on his way from Kensington to Westbournia.

"Now I have found you, I shall take good care you do not escape me again," she pursued, holding the other's hand and gazing up affectionately in her face. She thought Vivien much altered in appearance; not less beautiful (for her correct features, and pure if pale complexion, still satisfied the artistic eye), but graver, sadder and less youthful—the quaker-like simplicity of her attire was perhaps answerable for the last impression. Her dark-gray eyes were clear, steadfast, truthful, and truth-compelling as ever, but they had lost the dreamy expression that once lent a peculiar charm to their glance.

"Are you glad to see me, Vivien?" she asked, timidly.

Vivien smiled that full-hearted smile of hers which lighted her eyes and irradiated her whole face like mid-day sunshine illumining deep, still water.

"I was on my way to see you," she answered, quietly; "but I am glad we met here. We can talk without interruption. I have so much to say to you, Sybil."

"To say to me?"

"Yes; but, first, I wish to know how your father is—I heard of his illness only yesterday."

"He is better—he suffers no pain—but he will never recover; so the doctors say."

A troubled expression came into Vivien's eyes. She remained silent and thoughtful for some moments.

"Sybil," she said at last, "all these months I have been living among very poor people—people who have a hard struggle to keep the wolf from the door. Long ago, I told you that these people are my people. I am of their class; for I was brought up among them, and lived as they live. All my life I have longed to help them," she went on, earnestly, "but no real help can be given without money, and I have always been as poor as they. Now I may perhaps be rich, but—"

She paused in painful embarrassment.

"Yes, dear," ventured Sybil, gently. "Tell me everything. Have you come into a fortune?"

"Not exactly," said Vivien, averting her eyes. "Lady Villebois tells me that I am no longer poor, but—"

"Go on, my dear!" cried Sybil, gayly. "Why do you stop? I am dying of curiosity."

Thus adjured, Vivien told her with many a pause and stammer the story of her father's sin—softening the details considerably; but, in spite of her, hard facts thrust their ugly heads through the veil she tried to fling over them, staring at the shrinking girl with Gorgon eyes that froze her into silence.

At first this revelation seemed to stun Sybil; but being

a very practical little person, and tolerably clear-headed, she quickly understood the position and faced it bravely.

"Then Dallas Towers belongs to you," she said at last.

"So they say; but, remember my claim is not yet established. Sybil, do you know that I am not yet twenty-one?—though I must seem old to you," she added, gravely. "Lady Villebois threatened to make me a ward in Chancery," she went on, smiling, "but I begged for mercy. As I am a minor and have no legal guardian, I don't think any steps can be taken in this affair until I am of age. Sybil, I want you and Mrs. Le Marchant to keep this unhappy business secret—I want you to help me to do what is right." She spoke quickly, her face betraying sudden agitation. "Lady Villebois says I ought to fulfill my grandfather's wishes—to exact the uttermost farthing of his fortune—but I cannot do it—I—"

She stopped, her increasing emotion made speech difficult. She looked earnestly into Sybil's face; her lips quivered, her eyes filled.

"I will do whatever you wish—whatever you think right," answered the other, gently. Then, with a sudden flash of inspiration, she said, "We will ask Mr. Atherstone's advice—he shall be umpire—he always knows what is best to be done. And now," she added, brightly, "that is settled. Let us put this miserable business aside. I have so much to tell you, Vivien."

Arm-in-arm the two girls paced up and down the path until the bell of St. Mary Abbott warned them it was time to separate. Vivien had heard in a mutilated form from Lady Villebois the story of Sybil's strange wedding-day; but now she learned the whole truth. Never of a reserved disposition, Sybil poured out unstintingly the stream of confidences so long pent up in her own

bosom: she told Vivien of Ralph Atherstone's literary successes; expatiated on his wonderful cleverness; avowed at once her hopes and her fears, her love and her unworthiness.

Vivien listened with a smile on her lips and a light in her eyes. Perhaps Sybil's litany of love had an echo in her own heart, perhaps hope stirred there after its long winter sleep as the sap stirred in the trees. Felix was a free man now—did he love her still? Would he come to her, and claim her with love's sweet imperiousness?

Lady Villebois at first set her face resolutely against the compromise suggested by Ralph Atherstone on behalf of Mrs. Le Marchant and Sybil. Her mettlesome spirit rebelled at the idea of surrender. This claim of Vivien's to Dallas Towers and its broad acres had filled her thoughts so exclusively of late that the subject had taken deep root in her mind. Vivien was at last obliged to exert herself and boldly declare that she would not drag the story of Bernard Le Marchant's sin into the fierce light of a court of law.

"He has been punished enough," she said, quickly, when Lady Villebois had recounted for the hundredth time the enormity of his offense; "what good would be served if I stripped him of everything? He is a wreck in mind and body—he needs all the luxuries money can buy; his wife and daughter would suffer more than he, were I to do as you wish. Mr. Atherstone's advice is sound—a compromise is the only way out of the difficulty."

"And Dallas Towers?"

"Dallas Towers will be mine—that, I think, is just; the money will be equally divided between the Le Marchants and myself. Now, dear Lady Villebois, we have

had our first, and I hope our last, disagreement," she added, bending down and kissing her old friend's cheek. "Let there be peace between us in future."

"On one condition only."

"Name it."

"That you return to Rollestone House; these flying visits by no means content me. I want to have you here always. Promise not to return to Mr. Muffles and his back-shop. Come, Vivien, your old room awaits you. Stay here to-night."

Vivien smiled; a faint color stole over her face and neck. She glanced quickly round the familiar room—they were seated in the long drawing-room. It was a great contrast to her late surroundings in Camberwell, and her artistic eye reveled in the quaint beauty of its arrangement.

"Confess that you are tired of cataloguing musty volumes," went on her ladyship, mercilessly, as she followed her glance. "I read it in your face. You begin to see that you can be helpful to those who need help without condemning yourself to exile among them. I have no doubt Mr. and Mrs. Muffles are excellent people, but do they quite satisfy your social needs? Are they quite on your mental level?"

"Perhaps not," answered Vivien, slowly. It was a great admission for her, but she could not truthfully say that her life during the past winter had been altogether satisfactory.

"You will come back to Rollestone House?" persisted the other, determined to make the most of her opportunities.

Vivien was evidently in a tractable mood; it would be

as well to bind her by a promise that would hold her when less amenable to reason.

"Do you really want me?" asked the girl, hesitatingly.

"Of course I want you—I have missed you more than I can say. If my mind had not been sustained by excitement, life would have been unendurable. This affair of your grandfather's will was a godsend to me," she added, with a *malin* smile.

"That is finished and done with," retorted Vivien, decisively; "on that subject the last word has been said."

"So be it; but you have behaved like a female Don Quixote."

"Not at all. The publicity of a trial would have been terrible to me. I would rather sacrifice the whole instead of half my fortune to keep my parents' lives sacred from the prying eyes of the world. Do you think I could bear to hear their dear names bandied about from lip to lip—the story of their sorrows, the tragedy of my father's death, made the subject of conversation in half the drawing-rooms in London?"

"Dear child, forgive me. I understand now. You are right and I am wrong. I cry *peccavi.* I have been a very hard-hearted old woman."

History proverbially repeats itself. Months ago a phase of the same subject was being discussed by the two ladies when their conversation was interrupted by the advent of a visitor.

It was so now. The door was thrown open, and Wilson announced:

"Mr. Ormerod."

THE END.

Paddon

THE GREAT BERWYCK BANK BURGLARY

Ellis, Edward Sylvester

BY

J. G. BETHUNE

Author of "The Third Man," "Hands Up," "The Eye of Hercules," "The Cipher 'F'," "The Royal Ruby," etc., etc.

Specially written for "Once a Week Library"

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THE GREAT BERWYCK BANK BURGLARY.

CHAPTER I.

ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS.

ON the morning of May 27, George McIlvaine, cashier of the Berwyck Bank, was counting out to a customer the proceeds of a check, a task which he had performed many a time, and with an expertness gained by long experience.

The customer took the small pile of bills, which had been flashed out too rapidly for him to enumerate, and walked to the desk by the outer window, that he might count them before going out on the street.

It therefore became the turn of the gentleman directly behind this customer to be served.

The cashier looked up in the face of the bright-eyed man, dressed in a smart business suit, who stepped briskly in place in front of the counter.

The manner and expression of the cashier's face said as plainly as could so many words:

"Well, sir, I am ready to serve you."

Instead of offering him a note to be discounted or a check to be cashed, the caller asked in a low, business-like tone:

"Is the president of the bank in?"

"Mr. Dillingham is back in his room," was the reply

of the official, indicating by a flirt of his head the location of the "Directors' Room" at the rear of the modest building.

"Thank you," said the stranger, walking quickly along the open space to the door, on which he gently knocked.

"Come in," called out the bank president, sitting alone behind his desk, and looking inquiringly at the man as he stepped within.

"Mr. Dillingham, I believe?" remarked the visitor.

"Yes, sir."

The caller handed a card to the president, who, studying it a moment, laid it down and extended his hand.

"Ah, Mr. Fagan, I was expecting some one from your place; glad to see you; help yourself to a chair; place it near my desk."

The cordial invitation was obeyed in full, the two gentlemen being quickly placed so that no one could overhear what passed between them.

Mr. Humphrey Dillingham again glanced at the card, on which was printed: "Pixley Fagan, National Detective Agency, Leonidas Wyxtree, President."

"Of course you come in response to my note to Mr. Wyxtree," was the remark of the banker.

"Yes, sir; you mailed it by rapid delivery, yesterday forenoon; it reached our office last night, so I was able to be on hand before ten o'clock this morning."

In making this explanation, Detective Fagan was not wholly truthful; that is to say, he did not tell all. He had arrived in the little country town of Berwyck the previous evening, and had not been idle since then.

Perhaps he committed a little oversight when he answered the remark of the elder gentleman. More likely, however, it was not an oversight.

"Your bureau has the reputation of being quite prompt, and I think I may say successful, in these matters."

"Thank you; we have generally given satisfaction to our patrons ; I hope we shall do so in this case. Your letter did not give the particulars, Mr. Dillingham, of the loss your bank has suffered."

"No; I only referred in a general way to the burglary; it didn't strike me as worth the time to go into particulars in the letter, inasmuch as there would be much left to be told over again."

"Quite right."

President Dillingham had wheeled his cushioned chair around, so as to face his keen visitor, and twiddled his spectacles while he talked freely but confidentially.

The man who employs a detective to do a delicate job for him must act like the patient with the physician—keep nothing back. The banker's manner showed that he was in an unbosoming mood, for the occurrence which had brought Detective Fagan to Berwyck was the most startling in the whole history of the institution.

It was a favorite custom of the officer to ask questions instead of allowing a patron to tell a rambling story. By that means he learned what he wanted to know, and no more. He separated the wheat from the chaff, often finding grains which otherwise would have remained hidden.

"What is the extent of the bank's loss, Mr. Dillingham?"

"One hundred thousand dollars."

"Is that the exact sum?"

"To a penny. The funds were done up in ten packages, each containing ten thousand dollars. Those alone were taken."

"And of course considerable was left?"

"Yes; or our doors wouldn't be open to-day. While it will cause us much loss, it cannot affect the solvency of the bank itself. It means simply an assessment instead of a dividend for the stockholders."

"Which is anything but a pleasant prospect for them. When was the money taken?"

"Night before last."

"How was it done?"

"I hope you will be able to find out for us: it means a good fee for your agency," replied Mr. Dillingham, with a smile, and still twiddling his spectacles.

"Excuse me for expressing myself awkwardly. I will be more direct. I noticed from a glance at your bank vault that you use the combination lock, the kind not now so popular as it was a few years ago."

"Yes; it is secured by a combination of three letters. We have been thinking of buying the time-lock arrangement, but unfortunately have done nothing but think."

"How many possess the combination?"

"It looks as if several hitherto unsuspected parties have it, for the vault was not injured in the least. Whoever opened it did so by using the combination regularly employed."

"How many were supposed to have it?"

"Mr. George McIlvaine, the cashier, and myself—no others."

"You changed it yesterday?"

"The horse being stolen, we proceeded to lock the stable."

"How many watchmen have you?"

"Only one, an elderly man named Walker Otter."

"How long has he been in your employ?"

"Ever since the bank was organized, twelve years ago."

"Have you any suspicions of him?"

"It is impossible; he is as honest as the day itself; I would as soon suspect myself."

"What does he know about the burglary?"

"Nothing."

"How is that?"

"He slept through it all."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Mr. McIlvaine and I questioned him closely; we could not escape the belief that he told only the truth when he declared he knew nothing. No one could have counterfeited the consternation he showed."

"Why did he take a nap on that night?"

"Because, as he confessed, it has been his custom for years. He is stiff and rheumatic, and in his panic he owned that there hadn't been a night for a long time that he hadn't stretched out on the settee in the outer office and slept through without a break till daylight. He kept up his invariable practice, because he knew of no reason for changing it."

"Then, as he seems to be eliminated from the problem, let us look elsewhere. How about the cashier?"

"I cannot suspect *him*. He is a married man, with two children and an excellent family. He has been a leading church member and officer for ten years."

"I wish, Mr. Dillingham, that that could be accepted as proof of his integrity. I will say, however, that I like his looks."

"When did you see him?"

"A few minutes ago: it was he who answered my question as to where I should find you."

"He is above suspicion," was the decisive remark of the bank president; "it is impossible to suspect *him*."

"Very well, let him go, then," said the detective, whose "letting go" of the individuals named must be taken in a figurative sense. He had no intention of casting them out from his calculations until he was through with them. "The only other employee that I observed behind the counter was your bookkeeper."

"Yes, he is the only one, except on special occasions, once a quarter, when we call in help; but we have had no extra help on the accounts for several weeks."

"But this bookkeeper—what is his name?"

"Frank Dixon."

"He struck me as a bright young man."

"He is; the only son of a widowed mother, her sole support, and most competent in every respect."

"How long has he been in your employ?"

"About three years; but what reason have you for suspecting the bookkeeper? He was never intrusted with the combination."

"Not openly; but seeing the vault or safe opened and closed every week day through all this period, he may have managed to catch it unnoticed."

Plainly this suggestion startled the banker. He had not thought of it before.

"It may be possible, but I hope not."

"So do I, for the sake of Mr. Frank Dixon himself. Do you know whether he has any bad habits?"

"No—"

The intonation of this single word showed that the banker had broken off something he was on the point of saying.

"You interrupted yourself, Mr. Dillingham; what were you about to say?"

"Mr. Dixon is a caller upon my niece, Miss Mina Crosslands. That shows in how high regard he is held by me."

"And of course by Mrs. Dillingham."

"There is no Mrs. Dillingham; that is, so far as I am concerned. I am a widower without any children, but my niece is dearer to me than the apple of my eye."

"Naturally enough," responded Detective Fagan, with an inclination of his head and with the feeling that some interesting complications were dimly opening out before him; "let's dismiss him from the matter."

This was another device of the visitor, who resolved in the same moment that he would undertake several investigations of which he gave no hint to the banker.

To his surprise, however, Mr. Dillingham did not seem disposed to give up the startling idea that had been suggested. He continued to twiddle his spectacles and to look down at the floor.

"Can—it—be possible—?" he repeated in a low voice, as if communing with himself.

Detective Fagan's piercing eyes rested on the handsome pale face. He was studying it intently.

"Do you think?" asked the banker abruptly, looking up, "that it could have been Mr. Dixon?"

"At this stage of the business I do not accuse any one: it is too soon for that."

"But your suggestion that he might have got the combination from the cashier or me—why, it opens a world of possibility. Heavens! what will my niece think when she learns it?"

The visitor did not express the thought that came to

him—"Maybe she already knows it—perhaps her knowledge is a guilty one; such things are not impossible where love holds the reins."

"This burglary is known to the directors, Mr. Dillingham?"

"Yes; we had a meeting yesterday afternoon, when I laid the matter before them."

"What was done?"

"Nothing, except to indulge in a good deal of vigorous language."

"Some things were proposed?"

"Lots of them. The first idea was to hang the watchman, and the next to offer a reward, but when it became clear that that would be ineffective unless very large—say ten thousand dollars—it was dismissed as too expensive a luxury. Then one suggested the offer of a good sum with the promise that no questions would be asked. That, however, was too much like compounding a felony. Finally, it was decided that I should be authorized to employ the best detective service that could be engaged."

"Was not your letter to us written before that action?"

"It was; I told the directors that I was so well satisfied what their decision would be and that it was the best thing to do that I had discounted their action and had already sent for a detective."

"How did that strike them?"

"At first they were inclined to withdraw their authorization, but concluded to let it stand."

"You and the cashier are the only ones knowing the old combination; that is, you were believed to be the only ones. Who generally opened and locked the door of the vault?"

"The cashier. Rarely do I reach the bank until ten o'clock or a little before. Now and then, on special occasions, I have come down early enough to attend to that. More frequently I stay long enough after bank hours to close the safe, or vault, as we prefer to call it."

"You have never noticed anything peculiar in your bookkeeper's manner?"

The reply seemed prompt, but the detective observed the instant's hesitation on the part of the banker.

"I do not recall anything of the kind."

"Were the directors enjoined to secrecy?"

"We made a pledge to keep the matter from the public. Our employees have been cautioned also, even to the watchman, and I think no one has broken his promise."

"Has no customer of the bank made any refernce to it?"

"Not so far as I know—hold! I had forgotten it. A half-hour before you came I was standing behind the counter while the cashier was arranging business, when some one asked me if I had heard anything, and, when I shook my head, said it was too bad."

"Who was he?"

"That's the odd part of it. I was so pre-occupied that I was looking at the wall behind him, and cannot recall him to save my life."

"It's a small matter, anyway," was the off-hand remark of the detective; " it is possible that he referred to something else. Anyway, it would be strange if some of the many who know the facts did not leak. Who is your new watchman?"

The question was fired at the banker like the ball from a rifle. He started, smiled faintly and said:

"I fear you will think I have done a foolish thing."

"I don't know as yet what you have done."

"I hired a watchman yesterday who began his service last night, and yet I never saw nor heard of him before, and he is an entire stranger in Berwyck."

The detective indulged in a low whistle.

"That sounds odd, but what is your explanation?"

The remark of the visitor was a compliment to the banker, for it implied that, however strange his course might seem, he had a reasonable explanation for it.

President Dillingham felt the delicate flattery, and spoke more at ease, for he was beginning to like the detective:

"I was so disgusted at the result of employing home talent that I could think of none in Berwyck to whom I would give the trust. I telegraphed to my friend, President Belden, of the Shawmere Bank of your city, to send me a reliable watchman. He replied by telegraph that he had just the man, and he would reach Berwyck by the six o'clock train. Sure enough he did, bringing with him a letter from Mr. Belden."

"May I ask what the letter contained?"

"The highest recommendations possible; he said that the bearer, Kneeland Ely, had been their watchman for five years; that he had proven his courage by beating off three burglars who made an attempt to rob their bank; that no bribe could tempt him to betray his trust, and that I might consider myself fortunate in securing his services. There was no discounting such a recommendation as *that;* and, after consulting with Mr. McIlvaine, the cashier, I engaged him, and he is now on duty."

"It seems to me," said Detective Fagan, "that if this —what did you say his name is?"

"Ely—Kneeland Ely."

"If this watchman, Kneeland Ely, was such a prize for you, he would be equally valuable to the Shawmere Bank, and I don't see why Mr. Belden was willing to part with him."

"Naturally that thought occurred to me, and Mr. Belden did not forget to give a reasonable explanation. Watchman Ely's wife died last week, and it so broke him up that he told Belden he would have to leave the city for some months, until he could pull himself together. The associations of his home and surroundings were intolerable, but he was too poor to make such a change without securing a situation where he could earn something. He resigned several days ago, and Mr. Belden was looking about for something of the kind for the man when my telegram reached him. The poor fellow will always regard it as a direct interposition of Providence."

Without commenting on this singular story, Pixley Fagan said:

"Will you be kind enough to let me see Mr. Belden's letter, if it is within your reach?"

Mr. Dillingham, after a little fumbling, produced the missive and handed it to his visitor, who scrutinized it closely for a few moments. Then he passed it back, without reading its contents.

"I only wished to see the handwriting," he explained.

"Are you satisfied?"

"There can be no question as to that letter having been written by Horatio Belden, president of the Shawmere Bank. Our house keeps an account there, so that I may say his handwriting is as familiar to me as my own. What Belden says goes."

"You have no criticism on my action in employing this watchman on such a recommendation as that?"

"On the contrary, you would have been remiss had you not done so, but he is quite sure to have an easy thing of it for some time. The Berwyck Bank will receive no more burglarious visits for a good while."

Detective Fagan rose from his seat, as if he had nothing more to ask, but, at an inquiring glance from the banker, sat down again.

"You remarked some minutes ago, Mr. Dillingham, that you occasionally called in an accountant to help your regular bookkeeper. About how often in the course of a year does this take place?"

"Every three months, when we have our quarterly statements to make ready."

"And do you always employ the same assistant?"

"Yes; we have needed such help only for the last two years, and on each occasion we used the same person."

"How long ago did you tell me it was since he was last engaged in the bank?"

The president reflected a moment.

"Between two and three weeks."

"Will you give me this assistant's name, and whatever is worth knowing about the gentleman?"

"I cannot do that," remarked the banker, with an odd smile.

"You cannot! I do not understand you."

"The party about whom you inquire is not a regular bookkeeper, but calls here when needed, and whatever services are rendered are gratuitous."

"But his name—what is *that?*" demanded the detective, with a touch of impatience: "I must know his name."

"It is not a *he*," said President Dillingham; "the party about whom you are inquiring is a woman."

CHAPTER II.

"WHY THIS SIGNALING?"

IT was not often that Detective Fagan showed surprise, but he did in this instance.

The possibility of the bookkeeper's assistant being a woman had not occurred to him until the declaration came from President Dillingham. The additional statement, that the lady assistant gave her quarterly help without charge, was interesting.

But the banker had no wish to mystify matters. The relief he felt from the great loss the bank had suffered was only temporary. He now spoke with a gravity befitting the occasion.

"The assistant is Miss Crosslands, my niece. She charges nothing for her help, because she does the work from choice, being fond of that sort of thing, and with the necessary leisure at command. She is a skillful accountant, and her services are valuable."

"I do not doubt that, or you would not avail yourself of them."

"She is always pleased when the time comes round for her to take her place behind the desk and show Mr. Dixon the way to straighten out his accounts. When I spoke of paying her for her work, she was quite offended. She told me, however, that she wouldn't object to a present from me," added the banker, with a smile; "and she received it, of course."

"How much did you gain by the proceeding?"

"I think my niece is 'in' each time about a thousand per cent."

While this aimless conversation was going on, Mr. Detective Fagan was putting this and that together.

A superficial survey of matters directed suspicion toward Dixon the bookkeeper. He might prove innocent, but, at this stage of the proceedings, he was the individual to be investigated.

The bank president had volunteered the statement that Dixon was a caller upon his niece, Miss Crosslands. It was she who spent a few days every three months in the bank as the assistant of the bookkeeper, who was an admirer of hers.

Within the past few weeks she had been thus employed. During that period, as in the former instances, she must have seen the safe door opened and closed more than once.

Some young women are wonderfully keen. Their innocent stare hides an amount of knowledge little suspected or dreamed of by other folks.

It was not impossible that Miss Crosslands had managed to learn the bank combination from her uncle without his suspecting it, and that, too, without watching his movements.

What was easier than for her to do this by a little cunning natural to her sex?

Having gained the important secret, how readily it could be passed over to her lover!

Thus the labyrinth opened out before the detective. But speculation might go on forever and lead nowhere.

It is not difficult for the detective to theorize, but all

the theorizing in the world can accomplish nothing: action must do that.

It would never do to let Mr. Dillingham suspect the thoughts which ran through the officer's mind regarding the interesting niece of whom he had spoken. Investigation in that direction must be along different lines.

"Mr. Dillingham, I must ask that you will send for the watchman," said Fagan, with after hardly a break in their conversation.

The request evidently surprised the bank president.

"I think Mr. Ely is asleep at this hour, since he was on duty last night, but I will do as you wish."

"I do not mean Mr. Ely, but the other one—the old watchman. I presume he is also asleep," added Fagan, with a smile.

"His home is only a short distance off; I will request Mr. Dixon to notify him."

The caller had not suspected that it would necessitate the taking of the bookkeeper from his work in order to attend to such a slight errand. Berwyck had not yet reached to the dignity of metropolitan ways.

The president stepped out of the room for a moment, and when he came back remarked that the old watchman would soon be there.

"My presence may embarrass him," said Fagan; "so while he is here I will keep out of sight. I presume that closet will serve my purpose?" he added, glancing at the place where the president was accustomed to hang his hat and outer coat when spending the day in this room.

Without waiting for a reply the officer bounded up and drew back the door. The key was in the lock, but not turned.

"This will answer," remarked Fagan, coming part way back to his chair, but not sitting down.

"But what am I to do with Otter when I get him here?" asked the somewhat puzzled banker.

"Question him about the bank burglary: you are greatly interested; you are not sure you have all the particulars; you have thought of something else you want to ask him, and therefore you proceed to pump him."

"But," continued the banker, "I don't catch the meaning of all this. I have already repeated to you the statements made by the stupid fellow: why call him here to repeat them?"

"I want to study him, his words, his looks and his manner, while he is answering your questions. You know, Mr. Dillingham, there is a good deal in that—sometimes. It might embarrass him, as I said, for me to join in the examination, or to be present while it is going on."

"Very well. Ah, there he is!"

The knock on the door was timid. Fagan, with a cat-like bound, was in the closet and had the door drawn almost shut by the time Mr. Dillingham, with hardly any perceptible hesitation, called out:

"Come in!"

It was the old watchman, rheumatic, partly bent and very meek, who slouched into the room, with the air of a man expecting a summons to his own execution.

"Sit down, Walker," said the official, kindly, for despite the impatience he felt with his former employee, he could not shut out a feeling of pity when he looked upon his distressed countenance.

President Dillingham motioned to the chair just

vacated by the detective, and Otter slumped into it, in a state of collapse.

Fagan had shifted the position of the seat so that it gave him the precise view he wished. He could look straight into the old man's face while the countenance of the banker was in profile.

The blank darkness of the closet where the officer was concealed enabled him to do this without a possibility of being seen himself. Indeed he would have felt no fear with a person tenfold as observing as the watchman.

"Walker," said the president, "I have sent for you that I might ask a few questions about the unfortunate affair of the night before last."

"Yes, sir," was the meek response; "I would give the world, Mr. Dillingham, if that never happened; I would indeed, sir. If there's anything—"

"Never mind about that; regrets are worth nothing now. You admit that it has been your custom to go asleep, say about ten o'clock each evening, when you were on duty?"

"I think it—that it was between nine and ten—a little earlier than the time you say."

"It makes no difference; and on the night of the robbery you slept straight through until daylight?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you noticed nothing unusual during all that time?"

"No, sir."

"The outer door was locked, just as you locked it after taking charge of the building?"

"Yes, sir; them folks must have had keys that was oiled, so as not to disturb me."

"There was no need of their oiling the keys. The first you knew of what had been done was when I sent for you yesterday forenoon and questioned you?"

"Yes, sir; and if you had shot me I couldn't have been more s'prised."

"Did you sleep sounder than usual?"

"I must have done so; I guess the medicine—"

"You admit that you slept every night, and it wasn't likely there was any difference in the depth of your slumber. Have you told any one about it?"

"Nobody except my wife, and she promised to say nothing. You see I had to make her some explanation of why I was discharged. I thought I would say it was because I was drunk, but she knows I never drink. Mr. Dillingham, do—you think—they will hang me?"

"It would serve you right if they did, but inasmuch as that wouldn't bring back the money, you will not be harmed, provided you keep your mouth shut and tell no one what has happened—remember," added the president, with marked emphasis, "you must tell *no one;* you must not converse or allow any one to talk to you about the occurrence."

"You needn't have any fear about that."

Mr. Dillingham could think of nothing more to ask the old man, and told him he could go. Repeating his expressions of remorse, the wacthman shuffled through the door with the help of his heavy hickory cane.

The next instant Pixley Fagan emerged from the closet and resumed his seat.

"Well, what do you think of him?" inquired the banker.

"Stupid, but honest, is his epitaph; we may as well

dismiss him from the calculation. No use of pumping *that* well."

All the same, however, the sharp-witted detective made the declaration with a mental reservation.

Whether it was the manner or the words of the old man, or both, cannot be said of a certainty, but Pixley Fagan had caught *something* which started his ever-busy thoughts in a new channel.

Despite his own words and the caution of the president to the watchman against talking with any one, supplemented by the promise of Otter to hold his mouth sealed, the detective resolved that he would try his hand at pumping the "dry well."

"No; there's no use of bothering him," assented Mr. Dillingham; "I asked him ten times as many questions yesterday as I did to-day; but the substance of all his replies is that he was asleep when he should have been awake: therefore he knows nothing. The best and the only thing he can do is to keep quiet, for he can't open his mouth without putting his foot in it—helloa! come in."

This response was to a brisk knock on the door. Had Detective Pixley wished to leap into the closet he could not have done so in time to avoid being seen by the new caller, so promptly did he obey the summons to enter.

Accordingly, the officer kept his seat and looked at the man who, hat in hand, entered with the salutation:

"Good-morning, Mr. Dillingham; I hope I am not intruding," he added, with a glance at the visitor, and hesitating whether to advance further or to withdraw.

"Not at all; come in."

The man seated himself in one of the directors' chairs,

but at a distance of a dozen feet from the president's desk, and near the door by which he had entered.

"Mr. Brown," said the banker, addressing his visitor under the impression that he was doing a clever thing by thus veiling is identity, "I think I can arrange it about the paper you offer; of course I shall have to look into the matter of the collateral."

"Thank you," said the detective, quick to catch on; "I trust you will find it all right; it will be a great accommodation to us."

"You will excuse me a moment while I hear what Mr. Ely has to say: he is the new watchman that I have engaged."

"Ah," remarked the officer with a smile and slight nod toward the visitor; "I am sure you have taken a wise step."

Common gratitude ought to have led Mr. Kneeland Ely, the new guardian of the bank building, to acknowledge this compliment, but he sat mute, as though the sentiment was a little too finely drawn for his full comprehension.

"Well, Kneeland, what can I do for you?" asked Mr. Dillingham, kindly.

"I called, please, sir, to ask whether any one else has the keys to the outer door."

"Why do you ask that?" inquired the banker, in some surprise; "have you any cause for suspicion?"

"No, sir; but when you gave me the keys that Otter had been using I ought to have asked you. I just want to know, so there can be no mistake about it."

"Mr. Dixon, the bookkeeper, Mr. McIlvaine and myself have each a key that will admit us through the outer door."

"What I supposed, but I wanted to be sure of it. And no one else has such a key?"

"None that I am aware of except—*you understand.*"

There was a world of significance in this remark. It was a cute reference to the parties who had entered not only the building but the vault of the bank. Mr. Dillingham acted as though he did not wish "Mr. Brown" to suspect the meaning of his words.

He therefore cast a knowing side-glance at "Mr. Brown," and gave the new watchman the benefit of a faint smile.

Not to be behind his employer, Kneeland Ely replied with a big wink of his left eye and a nod of his head: *he* was not to be caught napping.

The face of Detective Fagan was as expressionless as the blank wall behind him.

And now, had there been a fourth party in the directors' room who was alert and quick of perception, he would have noted an extraordinary thing.

Mr. Dillingham turned partly toward his desk to search for some paper. Catching sight of Detective Fagan's card, he shoved it in his vest pocket: he did not wish that any outsider should see that, nor did he mean to disregard the officer's request that his presence in Berwyck should not be known to any one else.

During the minute that the banker was thus occupied he took no note, as a matter of course, of his visitors.

Detective Fagan and the watchman looked straight at each other, and both smiled. Then the former made a slight signal with one of his hands. The other replied at once.

It suggested two mutes talking with each other by means of the fingers of one hand.

The back of the banker being toward the watchman, the latter smiled and gesticulated more freely than the detective, for he was secure against any possible discovery.

The interchange went on with great rapidity for a few seconds.

Despite the blank stare which these two men gave each other, when they first met in the directors' room, it was evident they were not strangers to each other.

Somewhere else they had been thrown into each other's company, and long enough, too, to become acquainted.

It was fair to suspect that this meeting had been prearranged, else why this signaling?

One of the men seemed to be giving the other orders, though it would be hard to say which emitted and which received them.

Mr. Dillingham suddenly faced about. As he did so, Kneeland Ely rose to his feet, thanked him for his information and passed out.

And again the face of the detective was as expressionless as the blank wall behind him.

CHAPTER III.

"HE EMITTED A LOW WHISTLE."

THAT night was balmy, with a gentle breeze blowing. It had been showery during the day, so that the new moon was partially obscured by flying clouds, which rendered its light treacherous and uncertain.

Detective Fagan was in Berwyck in the character of a commercial drummer for a large clothing house. In-

deed, it may be said that the character was not wholly assumed.

A certain firm in the metropolis had experienced more than once the benefit of his services in that direction. The head of the establishment was an old friend of Fagan's, they having been associated from boyhood.

When an order reached the house in New York from some town in Minnesota, or Texas, or California, signed "Bolus," the senior partner well knew from whom it came.

Fagan declined to receive the commission he well earned, but now and then he could not refuse the handsome suit of clothes sent to his residence from the wealthy clothing firm.

In the course of the day, "Mr. Bolus" took three moderate orders in Berwyck, and forwarded them to New York. When night came he resumed operations in another line.

It has been intimated that this person was not a stranger in Berwyck. Although no one in the place recalled the fact, yet he had spent a week there a couple of years before when engaged upon a counterfeiting case.

During the afternoon he strolled through the town loitering on the outskirts and acquainting himself with what is called among the farmers the "lay of the land." He located the handsome residence of President Dillingham, and the more modest home of the bookkeeper and the cashier.

When night closed in he was more familiar with the town than were a good many people that had spent all their lives there.

Leaving the hotel at a late hour, he sauntered along

the principal street, as though out for a stroll before turning in for the night.

As was his custom, he carefully scrutinized every person whom he met, for a man following his profession must be observant at all times, to save himself from going astray.

There was little to excite interest, though hardly a face was lost upon him.

Suddenly he met a couple in whom he felt an interest.

They were Frank Dixon, the bookkeeper of the bank, and Miss Mina Crosslands, niece of President Dillingham.

The former was recognized at once, but he had never before seen the young lady.

They were so absorbed with each other that they, or rather he, did not notice the officer. So the latter managed to turn about and stroll after them without attracting attention.

The officer had no means of knowing whence they came, but judged they had been spending the evening with a friend, and her betrothed was now escorting her home.

He managed to approach near enough to overhear some of their conversation, but they were talking in low tones, and most of what they said was lost.

Turning into the quiet and more fashionable street, they gradually approached the home of the young lady. Few people were on the avenue at that hour, and Fagan placed himself near the couple.

The detective of the story generally gets close enough to the suspected parties to catch everything said, without being observed himself; but in real life such an exploit is rarely accomplished, for the reason that a

man or woman needs to be only half on guard to frustrate the attempt.

If the couple had spoken in little louder voices, or had their faces been turned toward instead of away from the officer, he might have kept the thread of their conversation.

But had they faced him, they would have noticed his attempt to play the eavesdropper.

The lovers walked slowly, while he kept at a respectful distance, intently listening and on the watch.

"Can it be possible, Frank?"

As the young lady asked this question she turned her head sideways and looked up in the face of her companion. Her musical voice and the position of her mouth caused the words to be wafted back to the ears of the detective.

The tones of Dixon were lower and of deeper voice. Fagan did not catch a word, but was quite sure he answered her question in the affirmative, for she quickly used the feminine expression:

"It is awful; I would rather die."

Again his response was inaudible. Then they walked in silence until opposite the gate leading to her home.

Now, two lovers had no need to be in low spirits. It ought to have been the other way with these, for they were young and deeply fond of each other.

There must be some unusual cause for their depression.

That cause could be but the one thing—the bank robbery. It cut them both fearfully close.

"They may have conspired to take the money for themselves, and now that the deed is done are filled with alarm, and perhaps remorse. Consummated crime is not half as rosy as imagination paints it."

The moon came from behind the clouds, and showed the figure of President Dillingham standing on his own porch, smoking.

He was evidently waiting for his niece. Seeing him, and in view of the lateness of the hour, Dixon parted with the young lady at the gate, instead of accompanying her to the door.

The uncle waved his hand in salutation of his employee, who returned it in a somewhat more subdued style, but neither spoke.

"I hope he doesn't recognize *me*," thought Fagan, who had made a few unimportant changes in his personal appearance. "Dixon is more likely to identify me."

The halt of the couple for a few seconds at the gate caused the detective to pass close to them. While doing so he glanced away, as though he saw something across the street which interested him.

At the moment he was nearest them they held their peace, but just before he came up and immediately after, they exchanged a few sentences.

"You haven't uttered a word, Frank, to any one?"

"No, and shall not. Do you think *he* suspects?"

"I'm sure he does not."

"You are certain there is nothing in your manner likely to arouse his suspicions?"

"I could not be more careful. Little does he think that I never slept a wink last night, and shall hardly sleep to-night."

"This will never do; you must keep a brave heart—"

Those were the last words that Fagan caught. He heard the murmur of voices, but nothing was intelligible. Still looking across the street, as though his inter-

est centered there, he was able, over his shoulder, to watch the lovers.

Miss Crosslands passed through the gate, which her escort opened for her, and bade him good-night. He lifted his hat, turned about and walked rapidly back toward his own home.

The detective would have been glad to follow him, for he was in the mood to believe that the least trifle might give him one of the clews he was seeking.

Such a course, however, would have been imprudent. Dixon would notice the act, and it would arouse his suspicion.

The first duty of a detective in shadowing a party is to make certain that he himself is neither shadowed, nor an object of suspicion to the one under surveillance.

Fagan continued forward until he arrived at a cross street. A few blocks brought him into the avenue where young Dixon made his home with his widowed mother.

Sauntering along in the same aimless manner, Fagan remained upon the opposite side of the street, with his whole attention fixed upon the humble cottage where lived the suspected young man.

No one was in sight. The lower part of the house was in darkness, but a light shone from the upper front room.

A quick glance to the right and left still failed to show any person. Stepping back in the shadow of the doorway of a store, where the glare of the street-lamp could not reach him, the detective waited and watched.

If the young man was in his room, the light would soon be extinguished. If the glow continued, he was not there.

The curtain was down, so that, had the position of the

watcher been more favorable, he could not have caught sight of the interior.

Five, ten minutes passed, and there was no change. Then the shadow of a person suddenly appeared on the curtain, passing across it like the figure on the slide of a magic lantern.

But it was the form of a woman that glided behind the screen.

Brief as was the glance of the watcher, he recognized it as the outlines of an elderly person.

"It's his mother," was his conclusion; "she is waiting for him."

As if in confirmation, the curtain was now hastily drawn up and the figure of the old lady was seen for a minute as she looked out on the still spring night.

Her action was that of one expecting the coming of some one who came not.

Detective Fagan shrank back, though he knew it was impossible for any one in her position to see him.

The woman held her place only a moment and then withdrew, first pulling down the curtain.

"He hasn't returned home, but where *is* he?"

Manifestly nothing was to be gained by staying where he was, in the shadow of the door. Fagan decided to carry out the original purpose he had in view when he left the hotel.

But at the moment he took a step forward he heard some one near him, and drew back.

It was one of the town policemen who was approaching with heavy step, and was not a dozen paces distant.

The detective was annoyed, for this boded trouble. His own position was such that the officer was likely

to call him to account, and more than likely to "run him in."

Nothing serious would result, beyond the inconvenience and delay. If he was compelled to give an account of himself, and it should not prove satisfactory, he had only to appeal to President Dillingham, whose word would secure his release.

But to be locked up would interfere with several plans he had in mind.

He had laid out considerable "business" for to-night, and to have it extinguished in this fashion would play the mischief with his plans.

He therefore shrank back as far as he could in the shadow of the door, hoping the guardian of the peace would pass him unnoticed.

So he did, swinging slowly by, looking neither to the right nor to the left, and probably seeing nothing in any direction.

All would have gone well but for an unexpected occurrence. The officer had passed a little way, when the window over the store and directly above Fagan's head was raised. Evidently the owner of the place lived there.

"Helloa!" he called in a guarded voice to the policeman, who stopped short and looked around and up.

"What is it?" he asked.

"He's in the doorway below."

"*Who's* there?"

"The burglar; he has been there a half-hour trying to bore his way through the door. Quick, and you've got him!"

Detective Fagan was in for it. He saw he must do one of two things: wait and quietly surrender (with a

night's incarceration as a certainty), or make a break for liberty.

He was a sprinter, and decided to try the break.

Darting out of the door, he sped down the street like a deer. *Crack! crack!* sounded two pistol-shots, and the lumbering policeman plunged after him like a bull.

The shots which he fired were meant to hit, too, for Fagan heard the whistling of the bullets close to his ears. By and by another passed, also uncomfortably close.

The fugitive knew he could distance his pursuer in a fair race, but he dreaded being headed off by the other officers that were sure to be attracted by the firing.

The acquaintance he had made with the city now served him well. After running a short distance along the pavement he darted across the street, still speeding swiftly.

He noticed the raising of windows, the thrusting out of heads and the excitement caused by the pistol-shots.

But he was fast drawing away from his pursuer.

Darting around the first corner, the fugitive dropped to a walk. He was in danger of meeting some other policeman, who, if he saw him running, would be sure to call him to account.

Fagan's quick gaze showed him no one resembling an officer, and he indulged in another burst of speed, which quickly took him to the next corner, around which he passed at the same deliberate pace as before.

It was well he did so, for within ten paces he came face to face with a burly blue-coated officer.

The latter scrutinized him sharply, and, to forestall any troublesome questions, the detective opened the ball.

"I think I heard some one shooting a pistol," he re-

marked, in a scared manner; "did you notice it, officer?"

"Where did you come from, young man?" asked the policeman in turn, not fully satisfied with his questioner.

"I came round the corner, right back yonder."

"Who are you, anyway?"

"Richard Bolus, commercial traveler for the best clothing firm in the country. If you can help me get the order for the suits of the force in Berwyck, why I'll make it all right with you. What's the prospects, officer?"

"Get along with you!" replied the policeman, hastening on in the direction whence came the sounds of firing.

Pixley Fagan followed directions, and was soon beyond danger of further molestation.

Fifteen minutes later he passed slowly by the bank building which had been the scene of such a striking occurrence less than forty-eight hours before. This was the objective point of his excursion.

Glancing up and down the street he paused a moment; but just then a pedestrian came in sight, approaching at a hurried pace. Fagan continued his stroll, until the stranger disappeared, when he stood a while, looking keenly up and down the street. The coast at last seemed clear, and, turning about, he came at a brisk pace toward the bank again. When opposite, he glanced sharply to the right and left, and emitted a low whistle, to which the response was instant and satisfactory.

CHAPTER IV.

"SH!"

THE reply to the detective's guarded signal was a soft, creaking sound, as if made by the cautious opening of a door. His eyes were fixed on the entrance to the bank, as shown in the glare of the street-lamp. He was not mistaken when he fancied that he saw one half move gently inward as if drawn by the hand of a person standing behind it. Fagan whistled softly again, and the half-door moved back further, dimly showing the face of a man through the opening.

The officer stepped nimbly up the marble entrance, and whisked within as though he were the shadow of one of the drifting clouds overhead. The door was closed, and the key turned in the lock.

"It's all right," whispered the new watchman; "I was on the lookout, and no one saw you."

The man led the way back to the directors' room, where, as in various parts of the bank, a dim light was burning. The curtains were down, so that the sharpest eyes could detect nothing from the outside. Seating themselves by the table, they began talking in low tones, the watchman seeming to have the same peculiarity of the detective in that respect. Not once did their voices reach the pitch that any one, attempting to listen from the street, could have caught the faint hum and murmur of the speakers.

For a full half-hour their conversation continued. Had President Dillingham known of it, he would have thought it singular that, after the detective professed

ignorance of this watchman, it should turn out that the two men were old acquaintances.

The couple were still talking, when both were startled by some one fumbling at the outer lock, as if seeking to obtain an entrance. Instead of betraying alarm, as would have been natural, the two men, after the first shock, were as cool as before.

"That's the president," remarked Ely.

"It will hardly do for him to find me here," observed the detective, glancing around for some place of concealment. "I guess that will do," he added, pointing his cane at the closet in which he had before taken refuge.

He stepped inside and drew the door shut after him.

"He may take a notion to look in there," remarked the watchman, who was shrewd enough to turn the key in the small lock and place it in his pocket. Then he stepped to the front of the building, where the fumbling at the lock was still heard. Whoever the visitor was he could not open the door, for the good reason that the big key was on the inside.

"Who's there?" demanded the watchman, in a gruff voice.

"It is I, Mr. Dillingham," was the reply.

"Step back from the door, so I can have a look at you," called Ely; "I must know it's you before you come in here at this time of night."

The president did as requested, and the watchman recognized him, as in fact he had done the moment he spoke. The key was turned and the door drawn inward.

"Have you anybody with you?" asked Ely, peering out in the gloom.

"I am alone."

The guardian of the building relocked the door, and

then faced his superior with a look and manner which plainly asked his business in coming to the bank at that unseemly hour.

"I am so disturbed over last night's robbery," he explained, "that I can't sleep You will excuse me when I say that, despite the high recommendations you brought, I did not feel quite easy concerning you. I decided to come down and look around."

As he spoke he lead the way to the directors' room, at the rear, taking the very chair that had been occupied a few minutes before by the detective, who was crouching in the closet a half-dozen feet away

"Well, how do you find things?" inquired the watchman, with the assurance of a man who is sure his employer has seen naught which he cannot commend.

"Very satisfactory—very satisfactory," replied the president, leaning back in his chair with a weary air; "that was a good idea in your making me step away so that you could see me before allowing me to enter.'

"Yes, a good thing for *you.*"

"What do you mean?"

"Had you not done as I requested, I would have opened the door about a couple of inches and put a bullet through you."

"Mercy! but suppose there were two or three of us?"

"Each of the five chambers of my revolver has its cartridge: I don't think I would have missed with them all."

The self-confidence with which this was said won the admiration of President Dillingham.

"I guess you'll do," was his comment; "if Walker Otter had been half as watchful last night, the Berwyck Bank would be a hundred thousand dollars better off than it is."

As Mr. Dillingham uttered the last words he arose and busied himself in removing his outer coat. As was his custom, he stepped to the closet to hang it on one of the pegs within. He was a methodical man, who never laid down the garment like most people. He acted as though he intended to spend a considerable time at the bank.

"Bless me!" he exclaimed, on finding the door locked, "that is too bad; but I have a key in my pocket."

He drew out a bunch, and tried one after another, while Detective Fagan on the inside prepared himself for the meeting. The watchman waited with a grim smile, and concocted the explanation he would give of the presence of the officer, when he should be discovered.

But none of the keys fitted, and Mr. Dillingham returned them to his pocket.

"It makes no difference," he remarked, proceeding to don his coat again, with the watchman's assistance; "there's no need of my staying here. Let me out the front door; I am satisfied with you."

Watchman Ely did as requested, bade his employer good-night, locked the big front door behind him, and then returned and unfastened the small lock of the closet.

"Confound it!" exclaimed Detective Fagan, as he stepped into view, his face flushed; "if I had been in there ten minutes longer it would have been a choice between kicking the door open or smothering to death. The old fellow would have been startled, but I think we could have satisfied him everything was right."

"There would have been little trouble about that, for you could have plead the same errand as he, and that, on hearing the noise at the front, you slipped in there to note what might be said by any visitors who wished

the watchman to bear some proposition to the directors. But it would have been awkward to explain how the key came to be lost, and why you didn't come forth on finding who the caller was. On the whole, I am glad he didn't discover you."

"So am I," assented the detective.

Instead of departing, as it would seem the officer might have done, now that his business was finished with the watchman, he resumed his former seat, and the two continued to smoke and talk until past midnight. Finally Fagan rose, yawned, flung away his cigar and said he would go back to the hotel where he had engaged quarters the night before.

The two strolled from the directors' room, along the open space outside of the railings, and paused a few minutes in front of the heavy outer doors. It was profoundly quiet, and they spoke in lower tones even than they were accustomed to use.

"*Sh!*" suddenly whispered the watchman, raising his hand; "there's some one on the steps again."

The noise was faint, but both heard the cautious footfalls of a person picking his way up the three steps that led to the entrance of the bank.

They were all attention, when an almost inaudible rustling caught their ears. Still listening closely, the watchman suddenly gripped the arm of his companion and pointed at the bottom of the door. Something white gleamed there, and was coming into plainer view each moment.

It was a letter which some one was stealthily shoving under the door from the outside.

"Quick! be ready to follow him!" whispered Ely.

Watchman Ely quickly turned the big key and drew

back the heavy door of the bank. He was deft at such things, but there was necessarily a slight delay, for such heavy objects cannot be snapped to and fro, like ordinary doors.

Without stopping to notice the letter at his feet, Detective Fagan leaped through the opening, the instant it was presented, and was outside in a twinkling.

He expected to see the fleeing figure, but the hasty glance cast around showed no person in sight. He stood irresolute, undecided what to do.

Meanwhile, Watchman Ely had been more observant. The Berwyck Bank stood on the corner. The party who shoved the letter under the door completed the little act before the key started to turn. He must have been moving off when the grating sound warned him of his danger. Instead of darting up or down or across the street, he whisked around the corner, the watchman hearing his feet as he made off on a run.

Fearful that the officer had blundered, Ely thrust his head through the partly open door and called:

"He has gone to the left! He is round the corner, running like the mischief!"

"Why didn't I think of that?" muttered the officer, bounding in the direction named.

The faint moonlight and the nearest lamp gave out slight illumination, but he caught a glimpse of a shadowy figure vanishing in the distance and was after it like a deer. The officer had little doubt of his ability to run down any ordinary fugitive.

But lo! the race had hardly begun when it ended. If the pursuer had really seen his man, he was out of sight the next instant. Thinking he might have darted into a doorway, or behind some object that concealed his

body, the officer continued, though at a moderate pace. Suddenly he observed a figured coming toward him, sauntering along at a gait the reverse of his own. The detective instantly dropped to an ordinary pace, his purpose being not to alarm the other into a renewal of his flight.

The newcomer proved to be one of the policemen of the town, his height, looks and manner proving he was not the individual whom the detective was so anxious to meet.

"Would you be kind enough to tell me whether you saw a man running just now?" asked Fagan, courteously.

"Yes, sir, I did," was the gruff response.

"Where is he? Where did he go?"

"The chap that I saw running is the one I'm talking to, and I want to know what the meaning of it is. If I ain't mistaken, I have met you before, sir."

"Perhaps you did, but I saw a suspicious fellow a while ago, and think he was after my watch."

"That yarn won't do," warned the policeman; "I'll be easy with you this time, but if you don't go home right off I'll run you in quicker'n lightning."

"You're rather rough on a gentleman," said the detective, assuming a meekness which he was far from feeling, "but I guess I'll take your advice."

"It'll be better for you if you do," growled the guardian of the peace, slouching on down the street toward the bank.

Detective Fagan saw that he had made a bad break, and he dared not return to the watchman until he was sure the way was clear. He had awakened the suspicion of the policeman, who would carry out his threat if the excuse was again offered him.

But it was easy for such a veteran as Fagan to avoid another meeting with the officer. He turned into a by-street, going over the route he had traversed several times that evening, until, confident that the way had opened again, he came back to the vicinity of the bank. He was not mistaken in thinking the watchman was on the lookout for him. The signal was promptly answered once more, by the slight drawing in of the door, and, as cleverly as before, he entered the building, where the couple again made their way to the room they had lately occupied.

"What a blunder!" exclaimed Fagan as he dropped into a chair. "Instead of darting around the corner the instant I was outside I stood staring like a dolt, until the fellow had time to get beyond reach."

"Did you see nothing of him?"

"Only a parting glimpse, and the next minute I barely missed running into a policeman: have you any idea that *he* could have been the one who shoved the letter under the door?"

"Policemen have been known to be mixed up in shady affairs, but the chap who darted along the side of this building was not an officer."

"Did you see him?"

"No; it wasn't necessary. Those men wear heavy boots or shoes, and some of them can sprint, but this man, whoever he was, had his feet clothed in calfskin or slippers. He may have darted into some open door that was waiting for him, in case of just such danger as threatened."

"But what about that letter?"

The watchman had already broken the seal and read the missive. He passed it to the detective, who, turn-

ing up the light overhead, traced the following interesting sentences:

"MR. PRESIDENT DILLINGHAM OR WHO IT MAY CONCERN:

"We've got the one hundred thousand dollars and you can wistle for it. Half a loaf is better than no bread, and don't be a clam. We'll agree to give you back seventy-five thousand dollars and us keep the rest, provided that ends the bizness and you call off your dogs and act square, and don't bother us any more. That's letting you off cheep and the only chance you'll ever have of getting any of the spondulicks back agin. If you'll agree to our terms, mark a cross in chalk on the front of the bank door. It needn't be a big one that'll attract notice and don't put it on till after bank hours. We'll see it and then we'll fix things so that the bizness can be finished without anybody getting hurt.

"We'll act square with you and if you want to get your seventy-five thousand dollars back inside of three days you've only to do as we tell you and act square too, but you can't undertake any tricks, without us getting onto you like a flee on to a dog. YOU KNOW WHO."

"That thing," remarked Detective Fagan, "shows that, despite the cleverness of the job, these people are unaccustomed to this business."

"What reason have you for saying that?" asked the watchman.

"Why do they make the proposition to surrender three-fourths of their plunder, after saying they have it all so secure that it cannot be taken from them? It shows they are afraid of being caught, and are anxious to compromise the matter."

"Possibly in some way they have discovered that Pixley Fagan has taken charge of the business," replied the watchman with a smile.

"If that were the case, they would withdraw the offer after my performance this evening. No, it's a

clear bluff; but, Mr. Ely, can you make anything of that handwriting?"

"It is disguised, as a matter of course—hold on!"

Taking out his penknife, the watchman drew the keen blade along the crease made by folding the letter across the middle, thus separating it into halves, one of which he handed to the detective.

"That will be enough for you; I'll see what I can do with the other."

Each carefully folded and put away his portion, the detective also appropriating the envelope.

"The night is getting well along," said the latter, once more rising to his feet; "I'll go to the hotel. If anything turns up, you can drop in on me there. Probably I will be here to-morrow night."

"Wait a minute," said the watchman, walking to the front door with the officer; "it would be rather awkward for you to run into that policeman again. Let's reconnoiter a little."

Each approached a window, and moved the blinds, so as to peep out without being observed. They carefully studied the outside, so far as it lay in their field of vision.

"Pix," whispered Ely, a minute later, "look diagonally over to the other corner, and tell me whether there is any one in the shadow."

The detective did as requested, and a minute later answered:

"A man is standing there."

"And he is watching the bank; I shouldn't be surprised, now, if he is the gentleman who beat you in the foot-race a little while ago."

"If that is the case, I will try it again," remarked the detective, fixing his gaze upon the suspicious point.

CHAPTER V.

"I MUST DO MY DUTY."

FIVE, ten, fifteen minutes passed, and the figure under the awning on the opposite corner did not leave his post of observation.

"We can stand it as long as he," said Detective Fagan to his companion; "he will become tired before morning."

"Sh! he is impatient already."

A lamp stood near the corner, where now and then the shadowy outlines of a man could be discerned standing well back toward the building nearest to it. As if weary of holding one position so long, the stranger changed his pose, thus enabling the watchers to observe him in the gloom.

Suddenly he stepped into plain view and moved at a rapid pace around the corner, taking precisely the opposite course from that of the man whom the detective attempted to follow.

"Now, Pix," whispered the watchman, drawing back the door so quickly that it gave out no noise.

Without a word the officer slipped through, and was after the individual that had held the front of the bank under surveillance so long.

Detective Fagan made no mistake this time, for the man was following the line of the main street, where the light was sufficient to show him plainly. But, though the hour was late, the couple were not the only ones abroad. Other pedestrians were astir, some going away from and some approaching the officer. Had the

one whom he was shadowing known the fact, he could have easily eluded his pursuer by wheeling about and taking the reverse course, or darting aside at the first crossing; but evidently he was unaware of the figure behind him, and every minute lessened the possibility of his escaping him.

At the second cross street the one in advance turned to the left. Fagan immediately broke into a run and went along the main avenue at a rapid pace. Several parties whom he met turned and looked curiously at him, but he could afford to disregard them as long as it did not happen that any of the policemen were among the number.

That brief spurt decreased the distance separating the detective from his man by at least one-half. When he made the turn he was no more than fifty yards behind him, and the other was in such plain sight that the pursuer was sure of him.

Fagan had already recognized him as Mr. Frank Dixon, whom he had shadowed earlier in the evening.

"Helloa!" muttered the officer, as the other made a second turn, which brought him in sight of the residence of President Dillingham; "this has a queer look. It can't be he intends to make a late call."

The detective now deemed it best to slip across the street, and he did so without being noticed. The other, so far as could be judged, did not look around—proof that he had no suspicion of the individual that was keeping so close to him.

The officer deemed it prudent to fall back and let the young man increase the space between them. Though there was little lamplight, the moon gave enough illumination for all purposes; and, if the bookkeeper dis-

covered the one behind him, the game would be up, so far as the detective was concerned.

Slower and slower became the pace, until, when nearly opposite the Dillingham residence, the one in advance almost halted. He now looked around, as if to note whether any one was observing him ; but the sagacious officer had anticipated this act, and shrank so close to the buildings that he was in no danger of being seen.

"He is watching President Dillingham's house," was the conclusion of Fagan ; "he expects to see something, and *he* is expected, too."

The library of Mr. Dillingham was on the first floor. That portion of the house was in darkness, but a light was burning in one of the upper rooms. It showed through the two front windows on that side, and one of the curtains was raised. That some one was on the watch in that apartment was proven by the action of the young man, though the officer, with all his acumen, could not discover what it was that guided the person standing near the gate and looking in that direction.

Dixon drew a match from his pocket and lit a cigar, which he puffed vigorously until the end was aglow. Then, when certain that the crimson point could be seen, he raised it above his head, still facing the house, and circled it several times from left to right, the same number of times in reverse order, and then repeated the first gyration.

At the moment of completing the last circling the light in the upper room of President Dillingham's house was extinguished and all became blank darkness.

"That's proof that the signal of the young gentleman was seen and understood," was the conclusion of De-

tective Fagan, "though the person on the lookout up there took good care to keep out of sight."

But his interest now centered in the young bookkeeper across the street, who, having completed the errand that took him thither, turned about and leisurely retraced his steps.

Waiting until secure against observation, the officer followed at a safe distance until the young man reached the home which Detective Fagan had held under surveillance earlier in the evening at the time he met with his stirring adventure with the policeman who mistook him for a burglar.

While it was hardly natural for one to return so soon to the scene of his escape, the officer made sure that no one was on the watch for him before trusting himself near the store from whose door he had darted in such haste.

As it was, he held back until he saw the young man enter the gate to his home.

The light was still aglow in the upper room where the form of the mother had been seen. A few minutes after the son's entrance it went out, and the whole house was in gloom.

"That disposes of Mr. Dixon for to-night," was the conclusion of the watcher.

Late as it was, Detective Fagan returned to his hotel by way of the bank, scrutinizing the house closely as he passed.

If he meditated making another call upon Watchman Ely he changed his mind at sight of the policeman, and walked with as brisk a pace as was prudent to his hotel.

Inasmuch as Mr. Fagan had been up almost all of the preceding night, he began to experience the need of

sleep. He lingered not, therefore, in securing it while the opportunity was his.

Fagan's first proceedings in the morning was to visit the home of President Dillingham. That gentleman was not accustomed to go to the bank, except once or twice a week, before ten o'clock. Since the burglary he was likely to be astir at an earlier hour than usual, and the caller found him ready to start. He greeted his visitor pleasantly, and the two stepped into the library for a talk.

"I suppose it's too early for you to have picked up anything?" remarked the host.

"Yes; I was pretty tired and thought the best preparation for a good day's work was a refreshing night's rest, so I took it."

"That was wise; I can't say that I was as fortunate, for this matter bears so heavily on my mind that my slumber is much broken. After you left me, and when it was close upon midnight, I put on my overcoat and walked down to the bank."

"May I inquire the cause of *that?*"

"I was nervous; what you said about the new watchman made me so distrustful that I decided to visit him when he wasn't expecting me."

"I thought," remarked Fagan with a smile, "that after reading Mr. Belden's letter I congratulated you on having so trustworthy a fellow."

"So you did, but it was the doubt in your face when I first told you what I had done that disturbed me."

"Well, how did you find things?"

"Our new man is a prize; he made me show myself before he would admit me, and then coolly said that if I hadn't done as he requested he would have shot me."

"That's the kind of man you want, and President Belden knew what he was doing when he recommended him to you."

"Yes, and I shall have no further apprehensions on *that* score."

"But," said the caller, more gravely, "I have dropped in to speak to you about your bookkeeper—Mr. Frank Dixon, I believe is his name."

Fagan observed the flush that overspread the bank president's face, as he asked:

"And what of *him?*"

"You must be aware that he is one of the parties about whom—ah—it is my duty to make some inquiries."

"I should sooner suspect my niece upstairs than him."

This remark impressed the detective oddly in view of what he had witnessed the preceding night.

"You told me yesterday that you never had occasion to distrust him."

"Never; he is the only child of a poor widow, as I told you, and no mother ever had a more devoted son. It would break her heart if any ill befell him."

"I sincerely hope nothing of the kind will occur. But, in order to do my full duty, I must be thorough. Can you furnish me with a specimen of Mr. Dixon's handwriting?'

President Dillingham looked fixedly in the face of his caller for some seconds without speaking. The detective calmly returned the gaze, each countenance motionless but expressive.

"Don't ask me any questions, please," added Fagan in his low voice; "but if you can, do as I request."

The host sat silent a minute longer and then, without a word, rose and walked to his desk. He fumbled among some papers until he found the one for which he was searching. Then he walked toward the other with the letter in his hand.

"Last Christmas the directors, on my recommendation, decided to make an advance in Mr. Dixon's salary. As an appropriate holiday present I sent him this letter, and here is his acknowledgment, written in such good taste that I filed it away. I will loan it to you for a few days, if you wish."

"Many thanks. To make the matter complete," added Fagan, after hastily glancing over the missive, "yours ought to keep it company. I observe they are fastened together, and it isn't best to separate them."

"Mr. Dixon, of course, has the notification which I sent, and, I presume, treasures it highly. This is the rough draft of the letter I was instructed to write. Under the circumstances, I did something more than indite a formal communication. It seemed to me the case called for it. What do *you* think?"

"Mr. Dixon's reply is so grateful and well expressed, dwelling on the manner in which you have referred to his services, that I have some curiosity to peruse your own letter."

All men have their weak side. The detective had touched that of the banker, who plainly was pleased by the delicate flattery of his visitor. Truth to say, Mr. Dillingham had spent a good deal of labor on his letter and was proud of the result. With some protestations, therefore, he passed the two documents to his caller, who thanked him and promised to return them in a few days.

At the moment when the officer had completed his interview he heard some person walk across the room directly overhead, from which the light had shone the evening before when a party within awaited the signal of Frank Dixon's cigar. The footstep was so light that the caller knew it was that of a child or young lady.

"Have you children visiting in the house, Mr. Dillingham?" he asked.

"No; why do you ask?"

"I just now heard the footfall above in your room, and it seemed to be that of a child."

"It was my niece; my apartment is at the rear, where I am not so liable to be disturbed by the noise."

Pixley Fagan had gained the knowledge he sought.

The two rose to their feet, preparatory to passing out, when the same dainty footfall sounded on the stairs. Mr. Dillingham stepped into the hall, where he kissed his relative and bade her an affectionate good-by. The detective respectfully loitered behind, but as he followed his host through the front door he managed to obtain a glimpse of the miss, who of course was the lady he saw the night before.

"A woman's instinct is unerring," reflected the officer, as he walked beside the banker down the winding graveled path to the street; "can it be that she has any suspicion of my purpose in coming here at this time of day? I have learned that a tender feeling exists between her and the bookkeeper of the bank, and that the proud uncle is not averse to it. He must hold the young man in high regard thus to encourage their love. I hope it shall not be my fate to bring sorrow upon the couple; but, if so, it will not be the first cruel blow I

have been compelled to strike, and I must do my duty—I must do my duty."

CHAPTER VI.

"WHAT'S TO BE DONE?"

DETECTIVE FAGAN felt that he had secured a number of threads floating and drifting within his reach, which, if rightly handled, could be woven into something.

While he had not yet settled upon the one who was the guilty party, he had picked up several important clews.

A man in his position needs to avoid the fatal mistake of jumping to a conclusion without proper evidence. One of the pitfalls of the professional detective is to set out with a certain theory and then try to force his facts as they come to light to fit his belief, instead of following the opposite course.

There should be no theory at all at the beginning of a case, unless a very general one. As the discoveries appear, they will of themselves suggest the proper line of thought.

On the other hand, it is impossible not to form a suspicion with the first glimmer of truth.

Suspicion in this case pointed to Frank Dixon, the bookkeeper of the Berwyck Bank, and all that had been learned so far strengthened that suspicion.

The reader knows upon what this distrust was founded, and the facts need not be referred to at length.

But the most lamentable part of the belief formed by the professional was that Miss Mina Crosslands, the ac-

complished niece of President Dillingham, was implicated with the wrongdoer, if indeed she was not a *particeps criminis.*

The words which Fagan had overheard, their manner when together, and above all, that singular signaling between them when the young man returned from his station opposite the bank, where he had been on the watch for more than an hour; all these pointed unerringly in the single direction.

The idiosyncrasies of crime are among the strangest phenomena connected with this strange nature of ours.

The partnership of a beautiful and accomplished young lady of the highest character in a bank burglary was almost beyond credence. In all his experience the detective had never known anything of the kind.

But the sagacious Fagan was ready with a charitable explanation, which virtually absolved her from guilt.

It was he, Dixon, her lover and admirer, that had planned and plotted the whole thing. He had taken her into his confidence, and, through her affection for him, she had yielded.

The deed being done, regret and repentance followed when they promised to be too late.

The officer grimly closed his lips and resolved again that he would do his duty, with no regard for the consequences to any one.

From the home of President Dillingham he went to his hotel. He decided to meet Watchman Ely that they might compare notes and consult together. He expected to find him waiting at the hotel, but saw nothing of him.

Fagan knew where he boarded, but preferred not to go there, through fear of attracting notice to Ely.

"Mr. Bolus" inquired at the office for a note or letter, but there was no mail for him. Disappointed, he ascended to his room on the second floor.

Sitting down at the window, which opened on the street, he immediately made a startling discovery.

He saw a man walking slowly on the opposite side, smoking a cigar and swinging a natty cane, something after the manner of the detective himself. His manner was that of a person who has nothing special on hand and is only dawdling away the hours.

While still in plain view this individual met another person, of ordinary appearance, also smoking; but instead of a cane, he kept both hands in his trousers pockets.

They passed as though strangers, neither giving the other the slightest recognition.

And yet, as Detective Fagan well knew, they were intimate associates, or, rather, confederates in crime.

Those two were desperate criminals, and had been concerned in some of the most sensational burglaries in the country. It was they who, it was morally certain, were the parties that robbed a bank in the interior of the State of New York, when the faithful cashier was shot and one of the clerks crippled for life.

And yet the cunning miscreants managed the affair so skillfully that it was impossible to convict them.

One was Paff Higgens and the other Hake Hoover, the latter an Englishman, and the man that sported the cane. Each traveled under half a dozen aliases, but those named were the ones by which they were best known to the authorities.

One fair look at their countenances, as revealed in the sunlight, left no doubt of their identity. Detective

Fagan was as certain of them as he was of Kneeland Ely's personality.

But the question which overwhelmed the officer was as to the cause of the presence of these two criminals in Berwyck on this day in May.

Had it been several days earlier, the explanation would have been self-evident: they were there to plan and carry out the robbery of the bank, but *that* had already been accomplished.

The whole thing was one of those mysterious phases of crime which often baffle the most expert detective.

Only one conclusion seemed reasonable: that was that they were in collusion with the bookkeeper and were on hand to complete something in the nature of a division of the plunder.

The entrance of the bank was so simple that they needed no help. Having the combination given to them by Dixon, it was comparatively easy to do the rest.

This, we say, was the only explanation which the detective could formulate, but it was far from satisfactory. The principal objection was that if Paff Higgens and Hake Hoover ever succeeded in looting a bank they would never tarry to divide with any partner.

The theory presupposed that they had done the actual burglarizing, and, that being the case, they would have wasted no time in Berwyck after completing the work.

But it was a waste of time thus to speculate. Fagan felt that Kneeland Ely must be seen without delay. Enough has been told to show their joint interests in unearthing the guilty ones—an interest which was to continue to the end.

But Detective Fagan preserved his coolness. He did not forget that while the two criminals were so well known

to him, he also was known to them and sure of recognition in the event of meeting them in his *propria persona.*

With the facilities always at command, he made a number of changes in his appearance. Confident that the men as yet were unaware of his presence in town, he retained the business suit he had worn from the first.

The changes in his looks were comparatively slight. Pixley Fagan was a man who relied much upon his power of facial expression. He could do wonders in that line. Then by assuming another gait, manner and style, as it may be called, the contrast was more effective than that which could be made by dye, false hair, beard and the ordinary contrivances used by the amateur.

Besides, if he made the metamorphosis too marked, it was liable to cause him trouble with the landlord.

But Fagan found no difficulty in moving below stairs without attracting attention. Sauntering to the desk, he glanced over the registry. Neither Higgens nor Hoover had subscribed under any name.

It followed, therefore, that their headquarters were somewhere else; and inasmuch as the Berwyck House was the only hotel in the place, they must have found private quarters.

Since, also, the criminals took opposite directions, it would seem that it was easy for the detective to keep upon the trail of one of them.

Confident in doing so, he sauntered forward, somewhat after his manner of the night before, but at the end of an hour had not caught sight of either.

They had vanished as utterly as if the earth had opened and swallowed them.

It was indispensable, for reasons which will duly appear, that he should see Kneeland Ely without delay. So, despite his reluctance to go to his lodging-place, Fagan hurried thither.

The new watchman made his home with a humble couple, an old man and his wife, who had no other lodgers.

Much to the detective's relief, he found his friend within, and ascended the stairs to his room.

The watchman glanced up with a smile when he noted the changes Fagan had made in his looks. He noted, further, that something unusual had taken place.

"I expected you at the hotel," was the somewhat dissatisfied remark of the visitor.

"I was there."

"When?"

"About a half-hour ago."

"I left a little longer ago than that."

"Then it was not my fault that I did not see you."

"But why did you not come earlier?"

"I did."

"When?"

"An hour or more ago."

"That was while I was at the house of Mr. Dillingham."

"It strikes me, Pix, that if you expect to be found at home by a caller it is your place to stay there."

"I have nothing to say on that point ; let it go. But, Kneeland, what do you think?"

"A good many things, when the necessity arises. You seem to be agitated over something."

"I have reason to be. Paff Higgens and Hake Hoover are in town."

"I knew it."

"You did! Why didn't you tell me?"

"I have just explained that I called twice to give you the news, but didn't find you in. So I came home to get ready for to-night, when, if I'm not mistaken, there will be music in the air."

Detective Fagan looked at this man who seemed impenetrable to nervousness.

"What do you make of it?"

Instead of replying, Ely smiled and said:

"I will answer you when you offer me *your* explanation."

The detective gave the theory already stated, to the effect that the two criminals had had a hand in the burglary of a couple of nights before, and were present to complete the business with their confederate, Frank Dixon.

But Kneeland Ely shook his head.

"That won't do, Pix; you're away off."

"Well, then, set me right."

"I don't know that I can. A little reflection, however, will convince you that it is impossible for you to be correct."

"You needn't go into any argument; I'll admit it; let me hear what you have to offer."

Watchman Ely lit his pipe and lolled back in his chair.

"To my mind this business has taken the strangest shape of anything in which I was ever concerned."

"I formed that opinion before I met you to-day."

"I know, or at least suspect, to what you refer, but I believe that Higgens and Hoover are in Berwyck for the purpose of robbing the bank."

"Bless me! There must be mighty little left to rob it of."

"Quite right; but there's where the grim joke comes in. They have looked over the ground before selecting this place for their attention. The sleepy watchman, the old-time lock—all the conditions were so favorable that they naturally fixed upon the Berwyck Bank as one of the easiest in the country to be cracked. But that was days before this affair of the other night."

"Then they have planned to rob a bank that has just been robbed?"

"Precisely."

"And, of course, do not suspect they are a day too late to the fair?"

"That's my belief. The secret has been better kept than one would have supposed where it was known to so many. There isn't a policeman in town that suspects it. Neither Paff Higgens, Hake Hoover nor Bike Warner dream of such a thing."

"Bike Warner! what has *he* to do with the business?"

"He's here, too."

"Anybody else?"

"That's the whole crowd; I've seen them all."

"And have they seen *you?*"

"No; I was lucky. You know before I left home I did all the disguising business necessary, for it might be awkward to work up any changes after hiring out as a watchman. President Dillingham might mistake me for a burglar."

"True; your own mother would hardly know you."

"For all that, however, I fought shy of the three gentlemen, and am sure they have no thought of my being here."

"There is none of them staying at the hotel."

"No; I am aware of that. They are stopping at a house in the town."

"Where is it?"

"I don't know; they're too fly to give themselves away at this stage of the game; I tried to find out, but had to give it up. You're pretty well disguised, Pix; suppose you undertake that job."

"I'll try it, of course, but doubt if I will succeed. Then they have no suspicion that you're playing watchman?"

"I rather think not; I should feel insulted if I knew they did."

"They will try the bank to-night—that is, if any reliance can be placed upon appearances."

"Undoubtedly."

"Well," remarked the amazed detective; "this *is* a go. I have heard of a man trying to touch off a blast, forgetting that it had already been fired, but I never knew of a gang of burglars attempting to loot a bank that has just been looted."

"Nor have I; we seem in a fair way to establish some precedents before we are through with this business."

"What's to be done?"

"Gather them in."

"How?"

"What can be more simple, when we know their plans? Those gentry generally make their calls about midnight or one o'clock. We'll be ready for them, Pix."

The detective mused for a moment or two.

"Do you recommend that we undertake it alone?"

"I have been turning that over in my mind; if there were but two I wouldn't want any better amusement,

but we shall find it difficult to handle those three—that is, so as to make sure of capturing them all; I don't want any to get away."

"But what is your plan, Kneeland?"

"We must take the mayor into our confidence; from what I have learned of him I think he is a sensible fellow; we'll get him to let us have two of his best men; we'll place them inside the bank or within easy signal; then at the right minute we'll close in; there you have it."

"The scheme seems a good one, as it should be, coming from *you;* but we ought to have something in the nature of a rehearsal. You will take your place as usual to play the watchman."

"No; I think I will put the old watchman, Walker Otter, on duty again."

"And why?"

"You understand that our three friends have founded their campaign on the belief that the sleepy old fellow still has charge. If they see me go in and handle the reins to-night they will postpone the business until they have time to investigate, and when they investigate and find that the blast has been fired, will decide not to waste any more powder."

"Will you explain to Mr. Dillingham?"

"Not until it is over; he will ask too many questions, and is in so rattled a state already that he will be sure to bungle matters, and more than likely give the whole thing away. I will go to Otter and let him think the president wants him to try his hand again. The only trouble about that is that he will be pretty likely to keep awake when I prefer to have him sleep. He will be so anxious to regain his prestige that he will be su-

pernaturally vigilant. I shouldn't be surprised if he showed fight, thereby rendering it necessary for the visitors to give him a pretty good whack over the head to quiet him."

"It will serve him right—that is, if the crack isn't too hard. And those fellows won't hesitate to strike it."

"The power of habit is strong, so I think, after all, Otter will spend the night as he has been accustomed to spend it for the last dozen years; anyhow, I'll take the chances."

"Since the line to follow is decided upon, let's fix the particulars. Shall I see the mayor?"

"Yes; arrange with him and I'll attend to the watchman."

"What of placing the policemen inside the bank?"

"Easy enough to do that; the party won't appear in the neighborhood before the night is well along. One of them may take a promenade past it about ten o'clock, just to assure himself that everything is straight. Before that we'll run the men in."

"What will Otter think?"

"More than likely he'll be snoring by that time. If he isn't, he'll be told that suspicious characters are in town and we think it best he should have company. He won't object."

"Who generally stands watch?"

"Bike Warner; that's his business; he's mighty good at it, too."

The plan outlined by Kneeland Ely was followed, so far as possible, in spirit and letter. He and Detective Fagan divided the work between them, and each understood his own and the other's part.

Fagan, keeping a sharp lookout for the burglars, vis-

ited Mayor Herkins and explained matters. The official proved to be an intelligent gentleman, who proffered all the assistance in his power. He called in two of his best officers, before whom the matter was laid, and they eagerly entered into it.

They were to saunter by the front of the bank precisely at nine o'clock that evening. Watchman Ely would stroll past at the same moment on the other side of the street, returning, as may be said, from a reconnaissance of the enemy's lines. If he moved his hat and wiped his brow, it would mean that the coast was clear and they were to enter the building without hesitation.

If Ely kept his hat on his head, they must saunter past without giving any attention to the bank or seemingly to the watchman.

This maneuver was to be repeated precisely fifteen minutes later, and if necessary, at similar intervals until the way should open.

Watchman Otter, within, would be instructed to keep the door unlocked until the policemen entered.

Once inside the building, they were to dispose themselves as their judgment suggested the best, to make sure of capturing the criminals.

Ely and Fagan would remain outside until they heard a prearranged signal from the policemen within.

It was the wish of the couple to secure Bike Warner, one of the worst miscreants in or out of the penitentiary. He would be in the vicinity, and the instant he suspected what was going on would take good care to save himself.

His location gave him much the best opportunity of escaping at the first approach of danger.

The preliminaries being agreed upon, Ely and Fagan

set out to put them in execution, neither dreaming of the astounding complication that was to ensue in the course of that eventful night.

CHAPTER VII.

"THEY HAVE ARRIVED."

MAYOR HERKINS of Berwyck not only knew when to hold his peace but made no mistake when he selected Policemen Smith and Brown to assist in capturing the criminals that had plotted to rob the bank of the town.

The officers were big, strong, courageous, cool, and, best of all, possessed good judgment.

Precisely at nine o'clock they sauntered along the street in front of the institution that had been selected for the unlawful attempt of the criminals.

Their acquaintances whom they met nodded in friendly recognition, but observed nothing in the manner of the couple to suggest that anything unusual was on their minds.

When in front of the brick building, Smith, who was on the outside, said in a low tone, referring to Watchman Ely:

"Yonder is our man."

"I will not turn my head; is he looking this way?"

"He doesn't seem to be; but we can't tell at this distance."

"It's time he raised his hat, if he's going to."

"He isn't going to; something's wrong."

Smith was right: the new watchman strolled past, as though in a brown study, and, turning the first corner, disappeared.

It was evident he had discovered something suspicious. What it was no one else could say, but it must have been unmistakable, else he would have made the signal agreed upon.

Neither of the officers knew the suspected parties, though both had fixed upon a couple of strangers in town as members of the company.

Without any change of place or manner, Smith and Brown strolled down the street and out toward the outskirts of the town.

"Here comes one of them," remarked Brown in an undertone.

He referred to a large, well-dressed man, approaching on the same side of the street at a leisurely pace.

"It's pretty near my time to lay off," said Smith; "I think I'll go home and turn in for the night: what do you mean to do?"

"I must stay at the office a while; the mayor will give me a raking down if I'm late again."

"He seems to be getting particular since he discharged Jenkins last week; I suspect he's in training for election."

Both laughed as though the matter was a joke. The brief conversation would sound pointless to the reader but for the explanation that it was intended for the benefit of the man whom they saw drawing nigh, and whom both believed to be one of the criminals.

The words were so timed that the stranger must have heard them all, and doubtless gained the impression they meant him to gain.

As soon as they were beyond earshot, Brown asked:

"What do you make of him?"

"He's Bike Warner."

"How can you know that?"

"That new watchman said he's cross-eyed: didn't you notice it?"

"I did."

"That settles it."

"You're right; that person is Bike Warner and no mistake. Pretty bright fellow that new watchman, Smith."

"Yes; he must be getting good wages to take the place of old Otter."

"Wonder if he'll stay long?" Brown added.

"Perhaps a week or so—that is, until this job is finished."

They laughed again. Evidently they had their own theory as to the personality of Kneeland Ely.

The stroll of the officers led them along the avenue in front of the residence of President Dillingham. The lower part was lighted up, and at the moment of passing Frank Dixon entered the gate and walked briskly up the graveled walk to the porch.

"He's rather late with his call," remarked Smith.

"He will even things by staying longer," observed his companion, and no other reference was made to the matter. The words showed the view of the young couple that generally prevailed in Berwyck.

Time was passing and the officers headed toward the bank. Before coming in sight of it they encountered Bike Warner again, though he was on the opposite side of the street. They gave him no apparent attention, nor did he manifest any interest in them.

"He's passed the bank to see if everything is right," was the conclusion of Smith, with which his companion agreed.

"Helloa," whispered Brown; "what does that mean?"

Watchman Ely was observed several rods in advance, walking in the same direction with themselves. Where he came from neither could say. Though he did not look around nor seem to be aware of the proximity of the policemen, the latter knew there was no mistake in the matter. He was certain they were behind him and his presence was no accident: it had its significance.

"He's been piping Bike," observed Smith.

"Risky business, for Bike's likely to pipe him."

"The new watchman knows a thing or two."

If Kneeland Ely wished to be joined by the policemen, he would slacken his pace. If he desired to draw away from them he would increase his gait. He did neither: therefore he preferred that things should remain as they were.

In the same aimless manner, Ely strolled forward, turning several times before he reached the street leading past the bank.

Smith glanced at his watch.

"Twelve minutes past nine," he said; "he'll reach the corner on the minute."

"We'll get the signal this time."

"Sure, for Bike is out of the way, unless," added the officer, "Bike takes it into his head to do a little more promenading."

Brown glanced over his shoulder. Nothing was to be seen of the burly criminal, with whom they expected soon to have a struggle.

Smith was right. Kneeland Ely moved past the bank on the opposite corner at precisely fifteen minutes after nine. While the eyes of both officers were on him, he raised his hat and mopped his brow with his handkerchief.

It was the prearranged signal.

Without glancing in any direction to make sure everything was right, Policeman Brown, in the most natural manner, turned slightly to the right, and, neither hurrying nor lagging, ascended the three marble steps of the bank.

His companion did the same, and was at his elbow when the former grasped the brass knob of the outer door.

The next instant an impatient exclamation escaped him.

The door was locked!

From some cause the watchman had secured the fastening against any unexpected intrusion.

Thus the first step in the stirring drama was a slip.

Nothing of the kind had been counted on, for Otter's instructions were that the door was to remain unlocked from half-past eight until ten o'clock. He had understood it and his blunder was unintelligible.

The situation was trying. To remain rattling the door was sure to attract the attention of passers-by and disarrange the programme, while to go away promised no improvement, since the same difficulty would remain to confront them.

"What's to be done?" asked the perplexed Smith, his hand still on the knob.

"I'm blessed if I know, unless—"

"Kick at the door till you wake him! he's in there asleep!"

The words were uttered by some one moving along the pavement directly below them. The person did not look to the right or left, but the glance of the officers revealed him as Kneeland Ely.

Smith followed instructions. He rattled the door harder than ever, and, raising his heavy boot, delivered

a kick that threatened to carry the structure off its hinges.

Immediate results followed. The key turned in the lock, the door was drawn inward and the scared face of Walker Otter peered out upon them.

"Bless me! what's the matter, officers?" he asked in a shaking voice.

The policemen stepped quickly within and locked the door behind them.

"You dolt!" said Brown, laying his hand threateningly on his club; "what do you mean by having that door locked?"

"Why, gentlemen, them's my instructions," was the wondering reply, as the old man stood before them, plainly revealed in the dim light of the several gas-jets that were kept burning all night.

"Weren't you told to leave it unlocked until we came?"

The watchman scratched his head meditatively.

"Bless me, I was told that, but really it slipped my mind; I hope you will excuse me, gentlemen."

"Why didn't you open the door before? We've been here a long time hammering and trying to get in."

"I heerd you, gentlemen; but you see my rheumatiz makes me move so slow that—"

"That'll do; you were asleep as usual."

"Upon my word, gentlemen—"

"Shut up, I tell you; go back to the settee and sleep if you want to, but don't bother us any more."

The watchman apparently believed it best to obey the instructions of the officers of the law, when given in such bluff terms. He walked to where he had been reclining on the settee and sat down with folded arms and with his gaze following the figures of the two policemen.

He wondered what they intended to do. They had not offered any explanation, nor did he dare ask for any, but he determined to find out.

He sat for several minutes bolt upright. That posture, however, soon became tiresome, and he assumed an easier one. By and by he shifted again, and then—the natural consequence followed—he sank into a deep slumber.

Meanwhile, Policemen Smith and Brown lost no time. Although the visitors were not expected for several hours, the couple arranged matters as though they were liable to drop in at any moment, which indeed may be said to have been the fact.

The safe or vault was at the rear of the large business room of the bank, being let into the solid wall, so that when the door was closed a comparatively even surface was presented. It was secured by the new combination, known only to the president and cashier.

The only other room used by the institution was reached, as has already been explained, by passing along the side of the business portion still further to the rear. All the curtains were down, so that no one could look in at night from the street.

Smith and Brown spent several minutes in learning their bearings, as may be said. They had never been in the directors' room, but were familiar with the more public portion. They passed to the smaller apartment.

"Here is the place to wait," remarked Smith, drawing up the chair of the president, sitting down and elevating his feet on the desk in true American fashion.

His companion assumed an easy posture near him. Then they had nothing to do but to await the eventful moment for the visitors to come.

That they would present themselves before the passing of the night neither felt the least doubt.

Their only companion, as may be said, was the large clock fastened against the wall. The ticking sounded unnaturally loud in the solemn stillness and the hands moved with the trying slowness they always show at such times. But for the monotonous ticking, they would have believed the piece had suspended business altogether.

The sounds of feet on the pavement outside were audible as the pedestrians passed the corner, the numbers gradually growing fewer as the night progressed.

Smith, half in earnest, insisted now and then that he recognized certain persons by the peculiarity in the noise made by their feet.

"That's the boss" he suddenly whispered; "I can't make any mistake about *him!*"

The doubting Brown softly rose and peered around the edge of the curtain.

"You're right," he said, coming back to his seat; "he's interested in this affair."

"I hope he won't try to come inside to see whether we are awake. It might spoil everything."

"Worse than that, it would disturb Otter."

The regular breathing of the watchman was plainly heard by the couple in the back room.

"I'm glad he's asleep; for he would kick up a rumpus if he happened to be awake when they came."

Suddenly the town clock began sounding the hour of eleven. Brown looked up at the face of the timepiece and saw that it agreed to the minute with the other.

"I was hopeful both were late. This is tiresome. Why can't those fellows keep better hours?"

The officer rose, yawned, stretched his massive limbs and then sat down again.

"They'll make up for lost time when they *do* arrive," was the comment of his comrade.

"Now I don't look upon it as impossible that they may make their visit a little earlier than the new watchman anticipates."

"This is a sleepy town, and eleven o'clock here counts the same as a couple of hours later in New York or Philadelphia."

"They will need a considerable time to finish their work. Not knowing the combination, they must use powder or dynamite."

"But with the old-fashioned safe they will bore through the outer door as though it were made of wood. Ely says they are old hands at the business and won't make any mistake."

"Except in not counting on our being here."

Both started from their chairs and stared questionably at each other. At that moment a heavy fall was heard in the outer room.

"*Sh!*" whispered Smith, rising softly and gently drawing back the door. He went out on tiptoe, while Brown stationed himself by the inner door, held partly open, so as to be ready to go to his companion's help the instant it was needed.

Smith called in an undertone:

"Come here, Brown!"

The other quickly joined his friend, who was shaking with laughter.

Walker Otter's sleep could not have been dreamless, for he had rolled from the settee to the floor, where he mutteringly adjusted himself and resumed his slumber.

"We may as well let him lie where he is," said Smith, "though I meant at first to lift him back again."

"You might stand him on his head and he would continue to sleep. Leave him alone— *St!*"

Some one had paused on the outside, as if about to enter the building. The policemen quietly hastened back to their former position, on the alert for their visitors.

But it was a false alarm. The halt by the one outside meant nothing. He resumed his walk and passed on.

It was now half-past eleven, and the crisis could not be far off. Smith believed the criminals would not wait many minutes longer, for the streets were as deserted as they were likely to be for a full hour or more.

Brown was inclined to think the mayor was nosing around and had made a move to learn whether the officers were prepared; but Smith thought differently. Such a course on his part would not be in keeping with his usual good sense.

But the long minute hand of the clock slowly climbed the face until it reached the last quarter, where it seemed to stop. Then it struggled free and worked slowly upward.

Still the visitors came not.

Some one walked rapidly past the window and all again became silent on the outside. The voice of a person calling to another, probably across the street, was heard, followed by the reply of the second one.

The watchers might well have imagined they were in some deserted residence, miles off in the country, beyond the reach of any friendly or unfriendly call.

The ticking on the wall grew louder than before. The officers had ceased conversing and were listening.

All at once the town clock began booming the hour of

midnight, each stroke ringing out loud and clear on the still air.

At the same moment a slight noise was heard in the outer room. Between the strokes it was so distinct that the watchers recognized its meaning.

Some one was working at the lock of the door.

The noise continued after the booming of the clock ceased. It was so well defined that no mistake could be made as to its meaning.

"It's the burglars," whispered Brown; "they have arrived."

He spoke the truth.

CHAPTER VIII.

"TWO SHADOWY FIGURES PASSED UP THE STEPS."

STRANGE as it may seem, Detective Fagan and Watchman Ely were more afraid of several other persons than of the men who they were certain had planned to burglarize the Berwyck Bank that evening.

Not afraid in the usual sense of the term, but the two dreaded that their own friends, through overzeal, would disarrange the plans formed with so much care.

The one who caused the most misgiving was President Dillingham. He had visited the bank the previous evening at an unseasonable hour, and was liable to repeat the act.

If he did so before the appearance of the criminals, they would keep out of the way and probably give up the job. If he called while they were at their work, he ran risk of being killed.

How to prevent his repeating his visit was a delicate and difficult question.

"You must look out for him during the first half of the night, so that if he appears you can turn him back."

"On what pretext?" asked Fagan.

"He expressed himself satisfied last night with his inspection. You can manage to meet him while he is yet a safe distance away, and say that if his new watchman finds himself under suspicion of incompetence after having received assurance to the contrary, he will be offended and leave his employ."

"Perhaps he will not care if he does."

"He will not want me to go in the nighttime, as you can assure him I will do if interfered with by him again."

"Suppose he takes a walk abroad and happens to meet you?"

"I will take care that he doesn't do that, if you will only keep him away from the bank."

"What will he think when he learns that Otter is back at his old place?"

"He can't learn it before to-morrow, and then it will be easy to explain matters to him."

The other individuals who caused misgiving to our friends were Mayor Herkins and his policemen.

Respecting the latter, the question was as to their fitness to face the burglars ; but, inasmuch as that question must arise regarding any parties taking their places, it caused less concern than the fear about President Dillingham.

The mayor was certain to remain on the alert through the night. He had informed the couple of his intention in that respect.

Indeed, he would have been a strange official if he had

gone home to sleep, knowing the town was to be racked by such an unprecedented earthquake within a few hours.

We have shown that he strolled past the bank while his officers inside were on guard. When he had done this for the third time Watchman Ely met him at a safe distance and begged him to refrain, since, if he did not, the whole scheme would be overthrown.

Mayor Herkins was sensible enough to accept the protest, and did as requested.

It now began to look as if matters would be carried out according to programme.

President Dillingham, as Ely believed, was under the eye of Detective Fagan, who would keep him at a distance.

Since, while the night was still young, the new watchman had considerable leisure on his hands, he concluded to visit the vicinity of Mr. Dillingham's house. The precise point where Pixley Fagan had agreed to keep his beat until half-past eleven o'clock had been settled, so that Ely knew where to look for him.

The locality was so retired that the friends could meet and exchange words without attracting notice. Ely had an important secret to tell, for after parting company with the detective he had made a discovery which Fagan ought to know at the earliest moment.

This was nothing less than the presence of a fourth member of the lawbreakers, in the person of Volney Biggs, who Ely supposed was doing time in a Western penitentiary, to which he had been sentenced several years before.

But here he was in Berwyck, and had therefore served out his imprisonment, been pardoned or broken jail.

The first unpleasant surprise came to Ely when he reached the lonely block where the detective ought to have been idling his time and failed to see him. The watchman went over the entire beat, meeting only three strangers.

"That is strange," he thought, with a thrill of misgiving.

It struck him as probable that his friend, in order to make sure that the bank president did not escape him, had called at his home.

It never would have done for Ely to show himself at Mr. Dillingham's house at an hour when duty required him to be at the bank. There was nothing, however, to prevent a reconnaissance by him.

Accordingly, he strolled past the handsome residence, scrutinizing it from the opposite side of the street.

It was wrapped in darkness; not a glimmer came from any portion. The owner was asleep and Detective Fagan was somewhere else.

Trying not to believe anything was amiss until he received proof of it, Ely now went back over the ground where his friend ought to have been.

Not the first glimpse of him was seen.

"It may be he has made the same discovery as I and is looking for me," was the next thought of the watchman. "He knows where to find me."

All in vain. Detective Fagan was gone for the time, and the new watchman was at a loss to understand it.

Ely's beat was a block away from the bank corner. No position could be more favorable, for by the aid of moonlight and the street-lamps, he not only had the front of the bank under his eye but could detect the

approach of any one, no matter from what direction he came.

A convenient awning and store gave him all the shelter he needed, and the distance was so short that he could reach the bank within a few seconds after being summoned.

His first purpose was to locate Mr. Bike Warner, who he was confident was to stand guard outside.

If he should happen to take the same vantage ground with Ely an awkward complication was likely to follow; but he would not be likely to do that, for it would have been contrary to custom.

He needed to be much nearer the bank, to give warning of the approach of danger and afford his confederates time to escape, or at least to cease their operations until the peril of discovery passed.

The town clock had just finished striking eleven when a figure came in sight which the watchman recognized as Bike Warner. He passed so near the doorway where Ely stood in the shadow that discovery seemed certain. Had it taken place it must have exerted a marked influence over what followed.

And had the criminal done his whole duty, he assuredly must have observed that shadowy form which once was within a few feet of him; but as he moved by, at a deliberate walk, his gaze remained fixed on the corner where stood the building to be plundered.

If any danger threatened, he expected it much nearer to the bank than was the watchman.

So he went on, and *that* peril was over.

Strolling beyond the corner, he turned when too far to be observed by Ely, and, returning, disappeared in another direction.

"He has found everything favorable," was the conclusion of the watchman, who was so well convinced that the burglary would not be attempted before midnight that he did not hesitate to leave his post.

Despite his certainty that a stirring encounter was imminent, Kneeland Ely was more disturbed at that moment because of the unaccountable absence of Detective Fagan than he was by the presence of the desperate men in the town.

Somehow he could not help associating the disappearance of his friend with the discovery of Volney Biggs, the fourth member of the company.

The detective's first supposition was that Higgens and Hoover were the only criminals in town, but he had learned differently from Ely. He was therefore on his guard against all three.

Knowing nothing, however, of the fourth member, the officer was at a frightful disadvantage. His well-known skill and experience enabled him to maneuver against two, three, four or more, but a prime necessity in such a case was that he should know just how many he was called upon to combat.

Moving out, therefore, from his hiding-place, Watchman Ely walked fast to the corner where Fagan had agreed to keep watch for President Dillingham. He was to remain there until half-past eleven, before it would be considered safe to leave the president to himself.

It would be hard to picture the increased misgiving of the watchman when he learned that his friend was still absent. Unquestionably he had not been at his post that evening.

"The pitcher can go to the well once too often," was Ely's melancholy conclusion; "but I hope it won't prove

so in this case. One more man or less doesn't make much difference in the world, but Pix is too good a fellow to be spared. Where the mischief can he and Volney Biggs be?"

Upon his return to his own station, Ely went over the same ground as before, so that he passed the house of President Dillingham.

It was still shrouded in darkness, as it had been for nearly two hours.

The watchman had not been given as favorable an opportunity to become acquainted with the little town of Berwyck as had the detective. When, therefore, he observed a light was shining from the upper room of a small building standing a little back from the street he had no suspicion to whom it belonged.

The fact was noticeable because it was the only house in the immediate neighborhood which showed that any one was astir within.

To one of Ely's observant nature the trifling fact had a meaning at this time which he would have liked to determine.

"Some one may be ill," he reflected, "but I believe that gas turned up to the highest point has something to do with the Berwyck Bank burglary or with—the absence of Pixley Fagan."

Time was precious, but he could not forbear lingering and watching for a few minutes.

The little street was so retired that the glare of the lamp and the light of the moon failed to show any person stirring. The only individual visible was the watchman himself on the opposite side of the street.

But the conditions changed the next minute. Some one came around the corner from the direction of President

Dillingham's home, walking fast. The watchman resumed his progress, but so slowly that he was sure of being overtaken before going more than a few rods beyond the cottage from which the light was burning.

His hearing enabled him to locate the other person without looking around. The better to conceal his identity, Ely assumed a limp and raised one shoulder, taking care to do this before the other had a chance to note the change.

Suddenly the sound of the footfalls on the pavement stopped. A backward glance instantly explained the cause. The man had left the flagging and was crossing the street diagonally. The soft earth failed to give back any sound.

He was the occupant of the house where the light was burning and was making haste to reach his home.

The moonlight and the glow of a lamp beneath which he passed revealed the young man to Watchman Ely. He was Frank Dixon, the bookkeeper of the Berwyck Bank.

"He doesn't keep good hours," was the natural thought of Ely; "but though it looks as if he was in the affair the other night, I don't believe he's in this."

Dixon hurriedly entered the house, ascended the stairs and then, as his mother had done the preceding night, raised the curtain and looked out.

He, too, seemed to be expecting the appearance of some one who came not; but, in his case, he was looking for one whom he did not wish to see, while she yearned for him.

The light fell upon him so fully that his face, shoulders and the upper part of his body were clearly revealed. The watchman had made himself acquainted with the

appearance of all the employees of the bank, so that the first glance identified the bookkeeper.

"I don't wonder the niece of Dillingham is infatuated with him; he's handsome enough to turn the head of any girl."

Dixon held his position but a few minutes, little dreaming that any one was observing him from the street below. Then down went the curtain, and in a brief while the light was turned out.

Watchman Ely glanced at his watch.

"Ten minutes to twelve!" he exclaimed; "I have no business here, but if I knew of any way to help poor Pix I would let the bank go, if the gang carried off the building itself."

There was no risk in walking fast, and the man made good time until he reached the position he had vacated nearly a half-hour before.

The most careful scrutiny of his surroundings failed to show anything out of the usual run of things.

But the change quickly came. The people on the streets were so few that it was easy to distinguish each as he came in sight. The figure of a large man strolled past the bank, just as it had done earlier in the evening.

Bike Warner was taking his last survey, preparatory to signaling to his companions that the coast was clear.

To the astonishment of the watchman, the man, instead of turning to one side, as he had done before, came directly toward him.

"Confound it!" muttered Ely; "this means detection, sure."

He would have slipped away had the chance been given, but to emerge from his shelter and hurry off would be the worst sort of a break. The suspicious criminal would

know like a flash what it meant. All that Ely could do was to stay where he was and meet the crisis as he had met many others.

The action of Bike Warner puzzled Ely, for it was contrary to the rules of procedure under such circumstances.

The other watchman's place was near the bank where he could give timely notice to his confederates. While, as has already been shown, Ely's situation afforded this view, yet there was one direction from which he could not see a party approaching until he arrived within a few paces of the steps.

The professional detective and burglar take no chances that can be avoided by shrewdness and vigilance.

But, at the culmination of Ely's chagrin and exasperation, the wished-for change took place.

Bike Warner was still several rods away when, like Frank Dixon, he turned and crossed the street diagonally.

This was a vast relief, as may be supposed, to the watchman, who shoved back the revolver which he had half drawn from his hip pocket.

Why this crossing of the street was made it would be difficult to explain, except upon the theory that the criminal detected something on the other side which he concluded to investigate.

The fact that he moved over a small space several times, where his actions were only dimly visible to the man shrinking in the shadows, favored this explanation. He probably observed a likeness among the shadows which suggested a person, and Warner speedily discovered his error.

His next movement was more startling than any yet made.

Without the least warning, he came across the street

again, heading for the spot where Watchman Ely was striving to keep out of sight.

Again the revolver was partly drawn from the pocket, and held so that the owner was sure of securing "the drop" on his antagonist, if the crisis should be precipitated by events.

But Bike Warner had not yet discerned Watchman Ely, and it was strange he had not done so. But the miscreant was not expecting *his* presence in town, and therefore was not looking for him.

Upon reaching the outer edge of the pavement Warner wheeled about and stood with his back to the watchman. Then he emitted a low, guarded whistle.

At that moment the clock in the town hall began sounding the hour of midnight. The watchful Ely saw two shadowy figures pass up the steps at the front of the bank and apply the key which they had ready. The door quickly opened, and they passed inside.

CHAPTER IX.

"STOP, OR I'LL FIRE!"

IT would not do for Bike Warner to retain his present position. As explained, he was too far from the bank to give prompt notice of the approach of danger. Accordingly, waiting only a moment after the door had closed behind his confederates, he sauntered to the corner and took position within a couple of rods of the building.

There, instead of assuming a fixed posture, he walked slowly past for a dozen paces, and then returned, beginning a regular tramp, which would give him the scope of vision he needed.

Watchman Ely was alert. Instead of following him immediately, he remained in the shadow of the doorway for full five minutes.

He wished to wait until matters were moving within the bank itself.

Then he stepped out from his concealment and imitated the action of the other watcher.

At that late hour not another person was in sight. Before, however, Ely reached the corner, a pedestrian came at a brisk walk from the opposite direction, his course taking him in front of the steps and past the sentinel.

The latter coughed in the most natural manner in the world, while the stranger, with no thought of what was going on so near him, hurried by and vanished from sight.

Ely had not checked his own moderate pace, and was now within a short distance of where Bike Warner was slowly walking back and forth.

The criminal had his eye on him, and seeing that he would pass near him, he again coughed. There could be no mistake as to the meaning of the simple signal.

An advantage presented itself to Ely, who was moving in the same direction as the other and only a few steps behind him.

It was evident to the new watchman that Bike Warner held no more suspicion regarding him than he had of the stranger who had just passed out of sight. Yielding to a singular impulse, Ely paused in front of the steps, as though he had caught some suspicious sound.

Bike instantly stopped in his beat, looked around and came back to where Ely stood.

"What's the matter with you?" he gruffly asked.

"I wonder if there's anything wrong in there," was the innocent reply of Ely.

"See here, young man, you had better move on. I've been hired to watch that bank, and I'll run you in if you hang about here. If you want to save your hide, hurry home and go to bed."

"I don't see what's wrong in my stopping here."

"You don't, eh? Well, I'll show you!"

Bike Warner advanced angrily, with hand outstretched to seize the throat of the innocent-looking person.

Ely retreated a single step. Then his right fist shot out like lightning, landing with crashing force upon the jaw of the astounded criminal, who staggered backward and would have fallen to the ground had he not collided with the lamp-post behind him.

Ely's blood was up, and he dashed forward, intending to fell his man to the earth and then slip the nippers upon him, but he was checkmated by the unexpected course of the ruffian.

Without uttering the signal to his friends within the bank to apprise them of what was going on, and without the first attempt to resent the assault, he turned and sped up the street like a deer.

For the moment Kneeland Ely was disconcerted, for he had not dreamed of any such display of cowardice. The next instant, however, he was after the big fellow with the fleetness of a greyhound.

Ely was as good a sprinter as Detective Fagan, and it need not be said that he did not let the grass grow under his feet. The fugitive kept in the middle of the street, where the way was open and there was no danger of running into any obstruction.

This suited the pursuer, who "let himself out" as if his own life was the stake. He steadily gained, and, if

no unexpected obstacle interposed, was sure to overtake his man in a very brief while.

Bike Warner had proven himself a poltroon, but a poltroon will fight viciously when driven into a corner. Kneeland Ely kept his right hand upon the butt of his weapon at his hip, ready to draw and use it the instant the necessity arose.

At the first corner the fugitive darted to the right with undiminished speed. Had he caught sight of any shelter he would have whisked into it; but hardly a second was at his command in which to search, and he kept on. Thus, when Ely shot around the same corner, he saw his man running in front of him, with the interval between them sensibly diminished and fast diminishing.

It was at this juncture that the pursuer became aware that he was not the only one chasing the burglar. Some person was running after him, and was close behind. Ely concluded a stranger had joined in the pursuit on general principles and with no knowledge of what it all meant.

But the watchman had no time to give the matter any thought. His hands were full with the fellow in front.

Berwyck, it will be remembered, was a small town, and the race had not lasted long when all parties were dashing through the outskirts.

At the next corner Ely had approached so close to his man that the latter would not have dared to drop out of sight had an opening appeared before him. He had not a spare second at his disposal.

"Stop, or I'll fire! I know you, Bike Warner!"

The answer was startling. The panting fugitive wheeled like a flash and let fly with two chambers of his

revolver straight at his pursuer, who was almost upon him.

Ely instinctively ducked his head and the shots sped harmlessly past, though it is not to be supposed that his action caused his escape. The fugitive was too flurried and in too great haste to secure a good aim.

The angered Ely fired one charge at the fellow, who had turned at bay, but with no more effect than the other shots. The next instant the two came together like a couple of tigers.

The fierce struggle lasted but a few seconds, when a blow felled Bike Warner to the ground and Ely sprang upon him. There the contest continued with the same ferocity. Both were powerful men, and each realized what was at stake.

With the exception of the command shouted a few minutes before by Watchman Ely not a word was spoken by the antagonists. Words, like laughter, draw upon one's strength, and neither had an ounce to spare.

It was useless to try to slip the nippers on the wrists of Warner. He was fighting too furiously. Ely therefore concentrated his strength in the single effort to conquer him.

He probably would have succeeded, for, after all, he was the equal of the other in muscular power and his superior in science, but fate played more than one queer prank with the actors in the drama of that evening.

It has been stated that a third party precipitated himself into the race. The delay caused by the collision between the principals gave this person time to arrive on the scene.

He was Mayor Herkins, whose withdrawal from the immediate neighborhood of the bank did not signify the

withdrawal of his interest in the expected events. Following the request of Watchman Ely, he took position in one of the side streets, from which he could quickly reach the bank should it become necessary.

Catching sight of a man running with another in hot pursuit, the mayor felt that duty required him to take part. Not the equal of either the fugitive or pursuer in point of speed, he still made such good progress that he soon reached them after they came together for the second time.

The chief executive had armed himself for this business. Beside the revolver in his pocket, he carried a policeman's billy under his coat. This he drew while on the run, concluding to leave the deadlier weapon for a more serious emergency.

Although Mayor Herkins was a sensible man, yet this was the first time he had ever been engaged in an affair of this nature, and he became a trifle rattled. He ought to have kept away altogether, or delegated his functions to one of his officers.

He saw two men struggling on the ground, the one underneath striving desperately to exchange positions with the other, and almost succeeding despite the determined resistance of the upper man.

One of the parties was the new watchman, and the other a stranger. There was no saying, as far as the mayor saw, which was getting the best of the struggle, so he interfered at the critical moment.

Time was so precious that the town's executive could not pause to take aim, but when his club came down the blow did execution.

One of the contestants toppled over, stunned for the

instant, while the other, struggling to his feet, was off again at the highest bent of his speed.

"Confound you! Why did you strike *me?*" demanded the irate Ely, quickly recovering himself.

"I—really—beg a thousand pardons—but it looks as if I had made a mistake, Mr. Ely; I hope you'll excuse me."

"Go home and go to bed; you don't know how to hunt *this* game!" was the angry response of Ely, who, seeing that not a second was to be spared, dashed off a second time in pursuit of the fugitive.

The latter was using his slight advantage to the utmost. Had the delay of the watchman lasted twenty seconds longer the criminal must have effected his escape.

The noise of pistol-firing naturally attracted attention in that part of the town, even though the hour was late. Making no reply to the numerous questions of the excited people, the chagrined mayor hastened after the flying couple.

The new watchman's head was ringing from the effects of the blow, but he concentrated all his energy upon the task before him and ran at his highest speed, determined to have his man at all costs.

Bike Warner vaulted over a low railing in front of a house, sped across the yard and darted round the building to the rear. Kneeland Ely did the same a few rods behind him.

The instant the fugitive was out of sight he looked around for something in the nature of a refuge. It was useless to run in this fashion, when he was certain of being overtaken. If he could dart into some cover, possibly he might throw his pursuer off the track.

But there must not be a moment's delay in finding the refuge.

Glancing to the right and left in his frantic search, he saw in the shadows the open door of a small building and made for it.

At the moment he was about to plunge through the opening a huge dog bounded out almost into his face. The fugitive wheeled and leaped the fence at the rear and continued his flight.

The mastiff started to follow, but just then Kneeland Ely, under full sail, came upon the scene. The dog concluded that *he* would serve his purpose as well as the other and went for him.

He was a formidable brute, and the watchman did not mean to let him sink his fangs into his leg or throat. Besides, he was tired of this interference with his performance of duty; it was becoming monotonous.

The canine was in earnest, and with a threatening growl came like a hurricane for the watchman.

"I'll settle *your* case for you!" muttered Ely, aiming with such care that the single bullet bored its way through the skull of the dog and stretched him lifeless.

The interruption had caused slight delay, but not enough to defeat the purpose of the pursuit.

Ely had kept the fugitive in his field of vision, and sped after him with redoubled energy.

Bike Warner made the fatal mistake of not keeping in the rear of the dwellings on the outskirts, among which he might have found some chance of temporary shelter. Instead of doing that, however, he began making his way back to the street from which he had fled.

The hot pace was beginning to tell upon pursuer and pursued—much more, however, upon the latter, for a life of dissipation saps the strength of any one. Bike Warner

must quickly discover some refuge or turn about and have it out with Ely, who was now fresher and stronger than he.

At the rear of a handsome house facing the avenue was a small wooden structure, one of several others that were used for domestic fowls, pigeons and pet animals. It was two stories in height, but the swinging open door was so near the ground that a moderate leap on the part of the fugitive carried the upper half of his body through, and he quickly clambered out of sight.

Ely had no objection to this, for he knew the man was "leaping into the dark," and had no knowledge of what the issue would be. The pursuer quickly made the circuit of the structure to learn what means of egress it possessed, in order to prevent his man stealing a march upon him.

There was a door on the opposite side, facing the rear of the residence, but it was reached directly from the ground. The ends of the little building were without any other opening.

By keeping the front and rear under his eye, he could hold Bike Warner securely caged. It will be admitted, however, that it is no easy matter for a person to watch the front and back of a house, with an alert foe inside on the lookout for a chance to elude him.

As the best that could be done, Ely drew off as far as his surroundings would permit and took position opposite one of the ends of the structure. By doing this he would detect the fugitive before he could run far.

Bike Warner, having found the refuge, made the best possible use of it, though he must have seen it could not serve him long. He did not show himself, but gave his main attention for some time to regaining his wind and strength. He kept an eye also on the upper and lower

doors. He had landed on his feet in the structure without mishap.

After a few minutes' rest he began groping about to make sure of his location.

This was not satisfactory. The sides of the building showed so few streaks of moonlight through the crevices that he struck a match and held it over his head.

The building was about a dozen feet square and high. Its purpose was the storage of hay, but there were only a few handfuls of dried grass on the floor.

He blew out the match and waited.

Kneeland Ely had been in that vicinity twice before, and that, too, within the past couple of hours. His keen perception enabled him to recognize the spot, even though his view-point was not favorable.

It was curious that the fleeing burglar should have taken refuge on the property of President Dillingham, but such was the fact.

Ely's greatest present fear was that of another dog precipitating himself upon the scene. That the thing did not occur within the following few minutes authorized the conclusion that Mr. Dillingham was not the owner of a canine.

The watchman felt that he had his man caged, but he dreaded the enforced waiting it compelled. It was easy to follow Bike Warner through the open window and have it out with him, but no bravery could excuse such an act. It was like hunting a burglar with a lighted candle: the advantage is all with the criminal, who has the best chance possible to pick off the other without risk to himself.

But Ely was anxious to learn what was going on at the bank. Matters there must have reached and passed a

crisis by this time. It was a pity that he should be compelled to stand idle, waiting for the fugitive to venture out and try it again or to surrender. If the latter was to be the issue it was not likely to take place for a number of hours.

The trees and outbuilding were in alternate moonlight and shadow. The watchman was on the alert and listening, when the outlines of a man appeared approaching the rear of the grounds from the front. He was either some one belonging to the Dillingham residence or he had come through the front gate.

When the moonlight fell upon the individual, Ely, with strange emotions, recognized him as his old acquaintance, Mayor Herkins.

"He has his club in hand, too," muttered the watchman. "I wonder whether he isn't satisfied with that blow and wants to try it over again."

The executive was anxious to do all he could to repair his blunder. He had striven hard to keep up with the procession, and managed to gain enough knowledge of the whereabouts of the two men to believe they were not far from the rear of President Dillingham's residence. So he looked for them in that place, and thus met Kneeland Ely.

It took but a minute to explain the situation.

"He's in there," added Ely, pointing to the small whitewashed house; "and we shall have to wait until he is ready to surrender."

"I see no need of that."

"What can we do?"

"I will bring some of my men and fetch him to terms."

" 'A stag at bay is a dangerous foe,' but that is the best thing to do, after all."

"Can you hold him here till we come back?"

"I'll guarantee to do that. I only wish he would come out where I can have a chance at him."

But the fact that Mayor Herkins was the executive head of the enterprising town of Berwyck suddenly broke upon that official with all its weight. It was not to be supposed that the fugitive crouching in the barn was aware of the overwhelming fact.

"Wait till I speak to him," said the mayor, walking toward the open window.

"Don't go too close or he'll fire at you," warned the watchman.

"He will not, after I tell him who I am."

The official had no intention of entering the building, but, pausing just below the open door, he called:

"Helloa, you in there!"

"I hear you," came from within.

"I am the mayor of Berwyck. I summon you to surrender."

"Why don't you come and take me?"

"If you refuse to give yourself up, I will bring those here who will compel you."

"What will you do with me if I knock under?"

"That remains to be seen; all I can promise is that you shall have justice done you."

"That's what I'm afraid of," was the grim response; "but what is your charge against me? I haven't done anything."

The mayor was about to attempt an impressive reply, when Ely whispered:

"Tell him you do not know of any charge. The fellow hasn't committed any overt act, nor done anything more than give me a pretty good tussle."

"All you will have to do is to prove your innocence of complicity in the robbery of our bank."

This must have startled the burglar, for, added to what had already taken place, it proved that the intention of himself and confederates had become known to the authorities.

Doubtless he held more than one uncomfortable thought concerning the man who had thus run him down, but unmistakably he was in a bad box.

"I think it's you that'll have to do the proving business, but I'll give myself up," was the unexpected addenda of the fugitive.

Mayor Herkins must have felt flattered by this deference to his exalted position.

That Bike Warner was in earnest was proven the next minute by his action.

"Meet me at the front door of my residence," he said, and the couple passed to that side. Then he came forth and stood before them.

"As a guarantee of good faith," remarked Kneeland Ely, "you will hand over that pistol to Mayor Herkins."

The fellow complied. As he did so, the three were standing in the full moonlight. He turned and looked so keenly in the countenance of Kneeland Ely that the latter smiled and asked: "Do you know me, Bike?"

Warner muttered something ugly and replied:

"Yes; and I'll get even with you for this."

"All right; it's fair warning, but just now you are under."

At the request of Mayor Herkins the watchman walked on one side of the prisoner, so as to help guard against any attempt at escape on his part. Shortly after Bike Warner was safely behind lock and key.

CHAPTER X.

"HE WAS HIT HARD."

MEANWHILE, a lively scene was going on within the Berwyck Bank.

Policemen Brown and Smith heard the parties at the lock of the outer door while the town clock was booming the midnight hour, and they quietly rose to their feet. It will be remembered that they were at the rear in the directors' room where they decided to remain for the present.

Though they had discussed the expected visit over and over again, and tried to fix upon their own line of action, it was impossible to do so except in a general way, inasmuch as much, if not everything, depended upon the course taken by the visitors.

If the latter should investigate the interior before beginning their work and enter the directors' apartment, it would precipitate matters. The battle would be on at once.

The door connecting with the outer room was on a slight crack, and the officers stood side by side, waiting and listening.

That the burglars were experts could not be doubted. It took them but a few seconds to open the outer door with one of their skeleton keys. Then they were inside with the door shut but not locked. One of them, Paff Higgens, carried a large bundle under his arm, while his companion, Hake Hoover, held a goodly sized gripsack in his hand.

Naturally, they gave their first attention to the watch-

man. Old Mr. Otter was stretched out on the floor in the condition of the seven sleepers.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" exclaimed Higgens. "He's a model watchman; I wish we could always have such to deal with."

"Better gag him," suggested the other, who laid his gripsack on the counter of the bank.

"I don't see the need of that."

He emphasized the last remark by giving the watchman a shove with his foot. The latter showed no sensibility to the disturbance.

"Let him alone, then," added Hoover; "no need of wasting any time on him."

And therein the criminal made a woful blunder.

The couple stood for a minute or two intently listening. Nothing to cause misgiving was heard. The gas was turned up and burning, and by its light the eyes, roving hither and thither, detected naught suspicious.

"Let's take a look in there," said Hoover, moving toward the directors' room.

"Hold on," interposed his confederate; "remember, we've got much to do. It isn't likely any of the bank men are lodging there."

Hoover accepted the suggestion, and the two lightly climbed over the counter, thereby placing themselves in front of the heavy door of the vault. Then they began their preparations.

The bundle, being unrolled, displayed several pieces of muslin, cloth and a couple of gum coats. These were to deaden the force of the explosion necessary to open the safe.

In addition, the gripsack and bundle contained a

quantity of fuse, putty and a valuable kit of burglars' implements of the finest make.

These were for active operations. They did not know the combination nor had they any means of obtaining it. It would not take them long, with their admirable tools and their own expertness, to bore through the door of the vault, insert the powder, packing the space around the fuse with putty, so as to render the explosion complete. The carpets, cloth and gum coats carefully spread over the safe would so muffle the sound that it was not likely to attract the attention of persons in the street.

Before operations could be begun the cough of the sentinel outside was heard. The couple were doing nothing to make any noise, but they paused and listened.

Hoover vaulted lightly over the counter and turned the key in the lock. Should they find it necessary to leave in haste the key could be readily turned, while they were naturally averse to having any one intrude upon them.

The cough of Bike Warner was repeated, and for the first time the burglars were alarmed. Could it be their scheme was discovered?

They hurriedly retied the bundle and closed the gripsack, ready to flee the moment they were warned to do so.

The understanding with Bike Warner was that the cough meant some one was passing the front of the building. It did not of necessity signify peril to his confederates. If he emitted a sharp whistle that meant "Run at once!"

But the whistle was not sounded. It will be recalled that Mr. Bike Warner was so engaged just then in a controversy with Kneeland Ely that he forgot about his friends in the building.

"It's all right," whispered Hake Hoover; "I thought everybody in this town was asleep by this time."

Justice must be done Watchman Otter while he lies slumbering on the floor. In his remorse over the occurrences of a couple of nights before, he had condemned himself too severely. Besides, there was a reason for his sleeping through those hours which had not yet come to light.

After his discharge he had slumbered at night like the majority of mankind. Having been awake through the day, and then summoned to his old duties again, just when he was ready to go to bed, he was in sore need of sleep.

He had now been unconscious a couple of hours or more, and was in that state that he was liable to awake at any moment and make trouble. Therein, we repeat, the burglars made a grievous error in not tying him and filling his mouth with something to restrain his power of speech.

Appreciating the value of the moments, and believing everything favorable, Higgens and Hoover took out their paraphernalia again and made ready for the serious business before them.

The first thing was to drill a hole through the front of the vault, just above the combination lock. Higgens was on the point of beginning the operation when the door of the directors' room creaked. Policeman Brown had accidentally moved it an inch or so.

"Paff," whispered Hoover, straightening up and looking to the rear, "did you hear that?"

"It was only the creaking of a door."

"But it wouldn't creak unless some one moved it. I'm going to look in there."

"All right; go ahead."

Hake Hoover again bounded like an acrobat over the counter and walked toward the directors' room. He had noticed through the crack of the door that the gas was burning beyond. That, however, did not of necessity signify anything, nor was he apprehensive, but he wished the full assurance that could only come with the absolute knowledge that no person was in the smaller apartment.

The door opened inward, and, without any hesitation, Hoover shoved it back and stepped across the threshold.

In the act of doing so he received a blow from a policeman's billy which sent him reeling backward. Before he could recover, Smith, who had delivered the stroke, was upon him. Brown bounded past his friend, and, leaving him to attend to his man, gave his attention to Paff Higgens.

"Hands up!" called the officer, leveling his revolver at the man within the inclosure, who was on the point of beginning operations upon the vault.

It is in such crises, when men accustomed to the use of firearms are concerned, that the whole question is often settled in the space of a single second. Brief as is that interval—the mere passing of a breath—it not infrequently decides as to which shall secure "the drop" on the other.

Paff Higgens, confident that no peril threatened, was preparing to drill a hole in the steel door of the safe, when his companion was hurled backward by the blow of Policeman Smith; and, taking only enough time to leap past him, the other officer pointed his pistol at Higgens and commanded him to throw up his hands. But, lo! in those two or three seconds Higgens had dropped his drill, whipped out his revolver, straightening up while

doing so, and it was his weapon that was leveled, like the finger of fate, at the breast of the dauntless officer.

Not only that, but instead of obeying the summons the criminal fired.

No man could have been more courageous than Policeman Brown, who, though struck, discharged his weapon in turn and went over the counter at a single bound.

The daring act was unexpected by Higgens, who was so sure of his man that he lowered his pistol. Before he could bring it up again the revolver was knocked from his hand and the officer closed with him.

Had Brown been himself, his superb strength and skill would have quickly made him master of the other. As it was, he was wounded and fighting at great odds, for his own shot had inflicted little more than a scratch upon his antagonist.

It is wonderful how often the best of marksmen fire wildly when at close quarters.

Smith, the equal of his comrade in the respects named, was at no such disadvantage. Indeed, his blow proved a great help, for, before the half-stunned Hoover could recover himself a more resounding stroke descended, followed by another, which placed Hoover *hors du combat.* Then the officer began adjusting the nippers.

The reports of the weapons, almost in his ears, told of the desperate nature of the contest between the other couple; but Smith did not dare abandon his man until he had him secure. Just before this was effected Higgens began resisting. Ultimately he was brought into subjection, but it took longer than was anticipated.

And during those precious seconds it was a struggle for life on the part of Policeman Brown, for his strength left him rapidly. Quick to see his advantage, Paff Hig-

gens put forth every ounce of power. By a fierce wrench he flung the officer off his chest and against the floor. Then in a twinkling he became his master.

The case was one of those in which the burglars threw all restraint to the winds. They were caught, and could escape only by putting their assailants out of the way. There was no intention of showing mercy, knowing as they did that none awaited them.

The brave Brown did his best, but was unequal to the task. He was obliged to succumb, as he had often said he believed he would have to do sooner or later.

Before the burglar, who had now become the assailant, could follow up his advantage an awkward form scrambled over the counter, caught him by the nape of his coat and hurled him sideways against the door of the safe.

"Consarn you! ain't you ashamed of yourself? Stay there, or I'll hurt you!"

It was Walker Otter, the watchman, who acted and spoke thus.

His nap having ended, he was striving to do his duty.

Still, he would have been no match for the younger and more wiry antagonist had he not received help in turn.

Smith, having secured his man, also sprang over the counter into the inclosure to learn how Brown was making out.

There was enough light for him to grasp the situation at a glance.

The motionless figure of his comrade, stretched full length on the floor, gave him the belief that he had been killed. It will be understood, therefore, that when Smith brought down his club on the head of Paff Higgens a second blow would have been superfluous.

A twinkling sufficed to secure him against doing any

harm, when he should come to again. Then Smith gave attention to his companion.

He speedily saw he was badly hurt, though to what extent he could not determine.

"Otter, go out and bring help as quickly as you can," said Smith to the watchman.

"Yes, sir. Gracious! if I had been a second later it would have been all over with him, wouldn't it?"

"Silence! Off with you!"

The watchman lost no time in following orders. He was astonished when he found a strange key in the door.

"How'd that get there?" he asked himself, drawing out the implement and inspecting it by the gaslight; "it ain't mine, for that's in my pocket."

He thought he did a clever thing when he used his own key to unfasten the lock, and flung the other away upon reaching the street.

"That shets off any ugly remarks about *that*," was his satisfied conclusion, though, had he thought a little faster, he must have seen that it could not have mended matters.

The mayor and Watchman Ely were in another part of the town, but of the half-dozen policemen doing night duty in Berwyck one was speedily found by the watchman. When he was told what had taken place he acted with promptness.

A physician was quickly secured and taken to the bank. It was strange that the encounter within the building had not become generally known. The only persons found there were Brown, Smith and the two prisoners.

An examination of the wounded officer showed that he had been hit hard, but the physician pronounced the wound not necessarily dangerous. The policeman had

rallied, and was sitting up and talking coolly over the occurrence.

"I tell you," he said, with a faint smile, as he looked at the watchman, "if it hadn't been for you, Otter, Billy Brown would have resigned for good this evening."

They were sweet words to the old man, and were heard by all. They were certain to be repeated to President Dillingham, and, if not too much explanation was demanded by him, were likely to restore his old situation to Otter.

A carriage was procured and Brown was taken to his home, where, it may as well be said, he eventually recovered, and received a generous reward, as did his companion, for his bravery in defending the Berwyck Bank against the burglars.

The latter, sullen and refusing to speak, were safely lodged in the lock-up, about ten minutes before Bike Warner was placed in durance by Mayor Herkins and Kneeland Ely.

CHAPTER XI.

"WHO WAS THE PERSON?"

PRESIDENT DILLINGHAM had just completed his breakfast, and had sat down in his easy-chair with his paper and cigar, when the door-bell tinkled, and the servant announced that a gentleman wished to see him.

The banker was surprised when the caller was shown in to find he was Kneeland Ely, his "new watchman."

"I hardly expected you. Nothing wrong, I hope, at the bank?"

"No; but I've called to give you notice that I'm going to quit."

The quitting of a watchman was not so serious a matter as to cause the banker much solicitude, but he inquired:

"Why do you leave after serving only a couple of nights?"

"I'm satisfied Providence never intended me for a watchman in a bank. I can't tempt fate any longer."

This was a curious remark, and Mr. Dillingham said:

"I do not understand you."

"You heard of the row I had with a lot of burglars when watchman at the Shawmere Bank?"

"The manner in which you acquitted yourself there was your strongest recommendation to me."

"That would have been well enough if it had been the end of the confounded business, but the burglars were after me again last night."

"WHAT!" demanded the astounded president.

"Your bank was broken into again, and we had a high time with them; but they made a bad mess of it, for once."

"Heavens! what does all this mean? Tell me about it."

Kneeland Ely gave the account. He adhered, in the main, to the facts as they have already been made known to the reader, but indulged in several variations in the course of the narrative.

It was necessary to do this to make the point he had in mind when calling upon the banker.

The chief difference lay in the description of the part taken by the old watchman, Walker Otter. This was made creditable in the highest degree. Indeed, had that individual heard what Mr. Ely said about him he would have blushed to the top of his bald head.

"You see," said the visitor, "I had picked up several

hints during the evening which satisfied me that something was wrong, so I got Walker to take his place inside while I watched outside."

"You had previously told Mayor Herkins, you say?"

"Yes; it was he who helped me catch the third burglar that was stationed on the outside—captured here on your own premises."

"Bless me! and I never heard a thing of it."

"Otter did his duty like a man. Policeman Brown is free to say that if it had not been for Otter the criminal with whom he grappled would have finished him."

"And Walker kept awake, did he?"

"He was about the widest awake man those burglars ever ran against!" was the hearty comment of Kneeland Ely.

"I am glad to hear that. Perhaps I was a little hasty with him. Now that you have decided to leave, I presume I can do nothing better than try him again."

"The wisest step possible under the circumstances," observed the caller, who thus scored his point. "I will tell him, if you wish, that he may resume business at the old stand."

"I will see him in the course of the day, and add a few instructions. So you think these safe-breakers have taken a fancy to follow you round the country?"

"What better proof could I ask than what they have given?"

"Nonsense! but if your mind is made up, I will not try to dissuade you. I will pay you for the time you have served, adding something in acknowledgment of what you did last evening."

"I'm obliged to you, but I can't accept anything for

such short service; let it be added to Otter's wages; he earned it more than I did."

"You will go back to the city at once?"

"No; I wish to keep away from there until I get more used to my trouble—you understand," said Ely, dejectedly. "I may stay in Berwyck for a few days, but not long."

President Dillingham seemed never to tire of asking about the occurrences of the night before. His caller gave the minutest particulars, even to the appearance of the tools and paraphernalia left by the visitors in the bank, which had been turned over to the authorities. He took care that the interests of Otter were not forgotten in these repeated narrations.

Finally nothing remained to tell. It was not yet nine o'clock, but the president made ready to go to the bank.

"Strange that these men should make the attempt immediately after we had suffered so serious a loss. Do you see anything in that?"

"Only a simple and yet remarkable coincidence," replied Ely, whose manner of conversation impressed his late employer as considerably above his station in life. "I have never known of such a thing, but that's no reason why it shouldn't happen."

"You think these parties had heard nothing about the robbery the other night?"

"The attempt itself shows they had not. You could ask for no better proof than that."

Mr. Dillingham had risen to go, but sat down again, his face slightly flushed.

"How many men were concerned in this?"

"Three; and we have them all."

Kneeland Ely had reasons of his own for making no

reference to Volney Biggs, whose hand had not appeared.

"That's fortunate, and they will get good long terms. How—will this affect the investigation of the *real* robbery?"

Had the caller been Detective Fagan, President Dillingham would have plied him with numerous other questions, but he hesitated when he remembered that this man was only a simple watchman.

"Of course I picked up enough around the bank," said Ely, "to learn about the big loss you suffered some nights ago, and, if you'll allow me, *this* can't affect *that* in any way."

Ely purposely spoke in a louder voice than usual. He was sure, at the same time, he was not mistaken in believing that a faint rustling on the stairs was made by some one attracted by his words.

Miss Mina Crosslands must have been stirred by a profound interest thus to play the part of eavesdropper.

"I should hope not," remarked Mr. Dillingham, rising, "for there, after all, is the real task before us. I am so interested in what you have told me that you will excuse me for going at once to the bank."

"I am surprised that you haven't cut short my call before this," remarked Ely, accompanying him through the hall and passing out the door, while the president lingered a moment to bid good-by to his niece.

Twenty minutes later Kneeland Ely presented himself at the humble residence of Walker Otter, the old watchman, whose praises almost every one in Berwyck was sounding for the pluck and bravery shown the night before.

Policeman Brown's compliments were inspired by grat-

itude, for, as has been shown, the intervention of Otter really saved his life.

Smith, equally good-hearted, saw a chance of benefiting the aged servant, and was glad to do it, especially when Ely suggested such a course was likely to secure Otter his old situation again.

So the heavy somnolence earlier in the evening was not made known to any outsiders.

The sagacious Ely was convinced that there was something about the strange drowsiness of the old man which had not yet been explained.

He meant to get at the bottom facts, which was his reason for presenting himself at the home of the watchman, with the request that no callers should be allowed to see the man until he was through with him.

Opening the way for what he wished to say by a number of compliments over his bravery, Ely quickly came to the point.

"Otter, only three persons know that when the burglars entered the bank last night—I mean three persons beside them—you were sound asleep, and had been for a long time. Those three are Policemen Brown and Smith, and myself."

"How did *you* larn anything about it?" asked the watchman, sheepishly.

"From Brown and Smith. But you needn't worry; we shall keep it to ourselves; we've agreed on that. What's more, I'll get your place back for you, provided you do me a favor or two."

"Mr. Ely, there isn't anything I won't do if you'll fix that, for it's almost broke my heart," said Otter, in a trembling voice.

"I want you to tell me why it was you went to sleep last night, almost as soon as you entered the building."

"I'm sure I don't know," was the puzzled reply.

"And then on the night of the robbery you did the same thing."

"Yes, and that's what gits me, too."

"And you have never done anything like it before?"

"Well, no; not exactly. I can't deny that, now and then, when everything was still and looked right, I have dozed for a few minutes in my chair, but never anything like on them two nights."

"But you told President Dillingham that that had been your custom for years."

"I shouldn't have said that," remarked the watchman, like a schoolboy detected in a falsehood. 'I was sort of desprit, mad and disgusted, and—"

"And what? Out with it. I'm your friend."

"I was afeard if I owned that that was the only night I slept so sound some folks would think there was an understanding between them wicked folks and me. That's why I made out it was a common thing with me."

"Ah! that idea wasn't a bad one; but we haven't yet got at the reason why on two nights you should have slept so heavily. One cause last evening may have been your wakefulness through the day. You were in need of slumber, but not to the extent of dropping off almost as soon as you sat down on the settee."

"That sort of puzzles me, but I can't explain it."

"Otter, has anybody forbidden you to talk about the robbery the other night?"

This abrupt question served to put the old watchman on his guard. He had lost sight of the injunction of

President Dillingham, that he should not allow any one to speak with him about the burglary.

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed, in dismay. "I forgot all about that."

He then told what the banker had said to him.

Ely laughed and replied:

"Of course. I had a talk with Mr. Dillingham this morning. You need have no fear on that score."

The old watchman was only partly satisfied. If he was to regain his former place he could not be too careful about offending his employer. At the same time he was grateful to his visitor.

"You are not a drinking man, Otter?"

"Never in all my life."

"How long have you suffered with the rheumatism?"

"It has been growing on me for more'n two years."

"What do you do for it?"

"Nothing of account. I reckon it's old age and can't be helped."

"Have you taken any medicine?"

"Yes, sir," was the prompt response.

"Have you tried anything new lately?"

"On the afternoon of the robbery I took a new remedy."

"Did you apply it externally or internally?"

The old man was not quite clear as to the meaning of these terms. Ely explained them.

"I took it infernally; that is, I swallered it."

"How often—that is, on the day of the robbery?"

"Once, I think it was."

"When did you take the dose?"

"During the night of the robbery, after I had gone on watch."

"Why was that?"

"Them was the orders."

"Given by whom? The doctor?"

The old watchman was growing uneasy under this sharp questioning. He did not reply. His silence was of itself an answer to the inquiry of Ely, who held his curiosity well in hand.

"You hesitate; you have gone so far that you need not fear to go further."

"I'd prefer to say nothing more, Mr. Ely, for it's aginst orders, you know."

"But you have already violated orders. Remember, I'm to get back your place for you."

"When you've done that come back to me."

"I have already done it, my friend."

The watchman looked at his caller in wondering doubt.

"I fixed it this morning before coming here. You will receive notice to-day."

It was a remarkable instance of how good fortune sometimes plays into the hand of a person, for, at that very moment, a knock sounded on the outer door.

Otter had cautioned his wife to tell any one who called that he would be engaged for a time and could not see him.

The murmur of voices was heard in the hall. Then his wife dismissed the person, and came smiling into the room where the couple were sitting.

"Mr. Dillingham has just sent word that he wants you to go back to work this evening, and will see you this afternoon."

It was a lucky intervention for Kneeland Ely. He quietly smiled as the pleased face of the old man was turned toward him.

"Don't you believe me now, Otter?"

"Yes, there ain't no disputing *that*."

"If it was so easy to fix matters with Mr. Dillingham it will be just as easy to fix them the other way. All I've got to do is to let him know the truth about last night and to tell him what you have already said to me about the robbery."

It was a cruel advantage to take of the old man, but Kneeland Ely believed the end justified the means.

"I won't disturb you if you'll go a little further with your answers."

"Have you quit?" asked Otter, filled with pleasure over his good fortune.

"I called on Mr. Dillingham, as I told you, this morning, said I was through, and asked him to take you back. But let that go. Was it the doctor who ordered you to take that medicine for the rheumatism?"

"No, it was no doctor at all."

"Who was it?"

"The man who gave the bottle to me."

"Of course; he took the place of a doctor. Where is the bottle?"

Again Otter hesitated. Ely sat motionless, with his eyes fixed on his face.

"I have it in the cupboard in the other room."

"Bring it to me; if you don't, Otter, I shall have you discharged again within half an hour."

The host, with a helpless air, left the room. He was gone but a minute when he came back with a two-ounce bottle in his hand, but Ely noticed it was empty.

"What's become of the medicine that was in it?"

"I took it all."

"When?"

"Last night, after going into the bank; I orter took it before that, but forgot it."

"What directions did you receive when your friend handed you this medicine?"

"I was to take a good dose of it that night, about ten o'clock, and that's what I done."

"Did it help your rheumatism?"

"I can't say as to that, for I don't 'spose I've give it a fair trial; you see, there wasn't much of it."

Kneeland Ely, while continuing his questioning, twisted out the cork and applied his nose to the opening. He was not a druggist, but he knew enough about decoctions to recognize on the instant the odor of laudanum.

There could be no question any longer that on the night of the robbery Walker Otter had been deliberately drugged, and that later the thing was repeated, though in the latter instance Otter himself was wholly responsible.

"Since the medicine is gone, I will keep this phial. Have no fear of my revealing anything; you are safe; all you have to do is to keep your own mouth closed."

The old man made a weak protest, but his caller quieted him, and put the phial in his pocket.

"Did a certain party call at the bank on the night of the robbery and give you this medicine, with orders to swallow a big dose and tell no one about it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well; now *who was the person?*"

The elder looked his visitor in the eye and said:

"I won't tell you his name, if I have to lose my situation agin for it, Mr. Ely; I've already told you more than I orter."

Kneeland Ely respected the old man's scruples too much to press him.

"Tell me if this man is connected with the bank, Otter; that's all."

After a moment's pause, the answer came:

"Yes; he has something to do with the bank."

"That's enough; thanks. Give yourself no uneasiness; I will look out for you."

The watchman seemed reassured by the words of his visitor, supplementing as they did the official notice of his reappointment to his old situation.

Kneeland Ely bade him good-morning and passed out to the street. Disappointed in more than one respect, he muttered:

"At any rate I have picked up a valuable point from *him*."

And yet the wisest man may be mistaken.

CHAPTER XII.

"OBLIGE ME BY LEAVING."

KNEELAND ELY was still confronted by the most puzzling problem that he had ever undertaken to solve.

Pixley Fagan, who had come to Berwyck to unravel the mystery of the theft of one hundred thousand dollars from the bank of the town, was unaccountably missing. He and Ely had parted late on the previous afternoon, with a full understanding of what each was to do in the impending attempt upon the institution; but, with that parting, the detective vanished as utterly as if the earth had opened and swallowed him.

Volney Biggs, a well-known criminal from New York City, and a member of the company engaged in the plot,

was, or had been, in Berwyck on the preceding afternoon. He, too, was missing, and had never once appeared during the exciting events already recorded.

What was his province in that affair? Why had he remained in the background, when he might have rendered material help to his confederates?

These were questions that remained to be answered.

The most discomforting conviction was that the absence of the two men were directly connected with each other. Ely could not free himself from the belief, which necessarily implied the gravest peril to his friend.

Though he had not an hour to spare in investigating, the extraordinary proceeding was self-evident; but, on the threshold, he was confronted by the dread that he was powerless.

The tracing out of the guilty abstractor, or abstractors, of the funds could wait; his province was to help the detective, or, if it should prove too late to do that, to bring home the crime of his taking off to the right parties.

Uncertain of what he ought to do, Kneeland Ely resorted to a trifling artifice, from which he expected little, but which, as is often the case in affairs of this life, was the means of bringing about momentous results.

First going to his lodging-place, he told the old couple that he would remain with them a few days longer. He had brought a small trunk to Berwyck, but left the house with a traveling-bag, supported by a strap over one shoulder. He made his way to the only hotel in town, and, registering, was assigned a room on the second floor, adjoining that which had been occupied by Pixley Fagan.

A few inquiries disclosed that that gentleman's luggage was still in his room, but that he had not been there after eating his supper, at six o'clock the night before.

The register contained a new name—"John O'Kane, New York City"—the only arrival within the preceding twenty-four hours. Ely would have liked to make inquiries regarding him, but concluded it was imprudent to do so; opportunity was likely to present itself for seeing the individual without drawing attention to the inquirer.

Ely had been in his room only a short time when he gained a chance for a brief stolen visit to the apartment of his friend. A quick, searching glance satisfied him that nothing was to be learned there, and he withdrew to his own quarters.

The town, as was to be expected, was in a ferment over the occurrences of the night before. They could not be kept from the public, nor was there any reason to do so. The reporters were hot on the scent, a number speedily arriving from the metropolis. Ely had to submit to a number of interviews, all of which he accepted with the best nature; but after he had told the story some twenty times, skillfully keeping back a number of the most important points, he shook himself clear and went directly to the sheriff's office at the county jail, whither the three prisoners had been removed.

"Have they had many visitors?" he inquired.

"The whole town is eager to see them, if I would permit," replied the sheriff; "but I won't. Do you want to interview them?"

"No; I had enough last night. Time enough for me to meet them in the courtroom."

"Seems to me," remarked Sheriff Wanser, "that you got onto those fellows in pretty cute style. You must have had a tip."

"Sometimes a word heard by chance gives an unex-

pected clew," replied the caller, parrying the question; "good luck has much more to do with success in matters like that than skill. So they have had no visitors?"

"Only one person—a lawyer."

"Who is he? One of your town folks?"

"No; a stranger, at least to me. He's from New York, though it's hard to understand how he could get here so soon."

"What's his name?"

The custodian of the county prisoners turned to the Visitors' Book, on the desk near him, and, after a glance, replied:

"John O'Kane."

"How long ago did he leave?"

"He hasn't left; he came about an hour since, introducing himself as a lawyer and friend of the parties. I had no reason to disbelieve him, so I called one of the keepers to show him to their cells. Do you know the man?"

"I have never met a person of that name."

"I think that's the man going out now," remarked the sheriff, as the noise made by the opening and closing of the outer door penetrated his office.

Ely rose to his feet and walked to the front window of the room. The iron bars stretched across the panes on the outside did not interfere with his view of the yard and the path over which visitors passed in coming to and leaving the jail.

A tall, well-dressed man was moving briskly toward the gate. Something in his figure and walk struck Ely familiarly, but he waited to gain a view of his face.

This came when he reached the street. In the clear sunlight, the man's countenance was fully revealed.

It was as Ely suspected. John O'Kane was one of the numerous aliases of Mr. Volney Biggs, which itself was an alias. He was the individual that had just held an interview with the prisoners, and the man who, beyond question, had all to do with the disappearance of Detective Fagan.

Excusing himself, Ely hurried out and reached the street before his man was beyond sight. It was not difficult, therefore, to follow him.

Keeping upon the main avenue, Volney Biggs went straight to the office of Lawyer Murphy, the principal counselor in Berwyck. There he remained until noon.

When he came out, he proceeded to the hotel and to his room. Fifteen minutes later Kneeland Ely was in his apartment, which was upon the same floor.

Ely had undertaken a most difficult work in thus shadowing Volney Biggs. While ordinarily such a duty is not ranked among the highest arts that the professional detective must master, yet circumstances often arise which place it almost beyond achievement.

It will be readily seen that the present case was one of them, for the man whom he was "piping" was one of the shrewdest criminals of his day, who was always on the alert for his mortal enemies—the officers of the law. A single misstep on the part of Ely, and his whole scheme would go to pieces.

It has been stated that before hiring out to the bank as a watchman, Ely effected a number of changes in his personal appearance. Indeed, few of his old friends encountering him on the streets of this quiet country town would have suspected his identity.

But while a change of costume is easy, the transformation of one's personality is a far different matter. It can

be done so as to deceive the most watchful, where the light is poor and the circumstances favorable, but it may well be questioned whether the most skillful detective can conceal his identity from a pair of bright, inquiring eyes under the glare of the electric light or the glow of the noonday sun.

At any rate, Kneeland Ely was so certain that if he met Volney Biggs face to face during the daytime the criminal would identify him that he took every precaution to prevent such a meeting.

He went without his noonday meal through fear of being placed at the table with him. He closed and locked his door. His apartment, being next to that of his friend, commanded a view of the front and of the main street. He did not mean to let Biggs elude him again.

There was every prospect of a long wait, and Ely assumed an easy position and lighted a cigar. He was in need of sleep, but his feelings were so wrought up that he had no fear of dropping into unconsciousness.

A half-hour passed when his keen sense of hearing caught the sound of a cautious footstep in the hall outside. Some one was stealing about and trying to avoid detection.

"It's Biggs," concluded the watcher, "and he's up to mischief."

The catlike footsteps halted opposite his own door. Then Ely saw the knob silently turned. It went around far enough to draw the catch out of the lock. A gentle pressure followed, but the door, being fastened, did not yield.

A second time the effort was made, with the same result.

Then the would-be intruder ceased. The key was in

the lock. The door could not be opened without pushing it out and inserting another instrument.

Holding his handkerchief, as if by accident, so as to conceal his features, Ely watched the door. He knew it was Biggs who was trying the lock, and he did not mean that he should gain a view of his face if he peered through the slight crevice beside the key. He therefore hid his features with his handkerchief.

Something glistened, as if a diamond in the key had been disturbed during the manipulation. It was the reflection of light against the eye of a person who was stooping down and trying to look into the room. Ely knew what it meant.

The view could not have been very satisfactory, but Volney Biggs had to be content. He withdrew without perceptible noise.

The little incident caused Kneeland Ely something like consternation, for it seemed to prove that the fellow had identified him. If such were the fact, the difficulty of the situation was immeasurably increased, for with Biggs warned, he would baffle almost any effort that could be brought against him.

But *sh!*

Something was disturbed in the adjoining room. The noise was slight, but it was as if a chair had been gently stirred.

The face of Kneeland Ely lightened. He understood now what it all meant. Volney Biggs was looking for Pixley Fagan's room, and had missed it on the first trial. The detective had taken out his key, so the intruder opened it with a false one.

Ely stepped over to the wall and pressed his ear against

it. He could readily hear the man stealthily moving around.

The listener was indignant, and felt a strong impulse to burst into the room and thrust out the intruder upon his friend's privacy.

But that would have been impolitic to the last degree. It would bring the couple face to face, the very catastrophe which Ely was so anxious to avoid.

Besides, Biggs might readily plead a mistake, and appropriately demand what right Ely had to interfere.

Whatever the errand of the intruder, it was quickly over, and he withdrew. Softly opening his own door, Ely listened. The next minute the man was heard descending the stairs. There being no call for secrecy in this movement, it was easy to hear his footsteps.

Ely darted to the front window, holding himself ready to follow the other; but minute after minute passed without anything being seen of him.

A man in the situation of Kneeland Ely cannot restrain himself from forming theories without number respecting the one great subject in his mind. It would be useless to attempt to give those which came to him, the most being dismissed as soon as they assumed shape. It is only necessary to say that, for the first time since he had undertaken the singular task before him, Ely began to consider the possibility that his first supposition was wrong, and that, strange as was the disappearance of Detective Fagan, Volney Biggs, after all, had nothing to do with it.

The probabilities, however, still pointed the other way, and he was determined to keep the man under his eye.

At the end of a half-hour Ely descended the stairs, resolved to find out what had become of Biggs.

He learned that he had been engaged with his dinner. Gripsack in hand, he was in the act of passing out the front door, as though he meant to leave the town. It was easy to hold him in sight without betraying himself, and Ely did so.

Biggs walked at a leisurely pace to the railway station, where he purchased a ticket for New York and boarded the train which passed, at the end of fifteen minutes.

This might be a blind, but Ely believed the man intended to go to the metropolis. Nothing seemed more natural than that he should do so. Instead, therefore, of following him, Ely decided to remain in Berwyck.

The little play of shadowing the other convinced the watcher of one thing: Volney Biggs had no suspicion that he was under surveillance.

Ely looked upon the situation as so critical that he decided upon a step which, under other circumstances, nothing could have induced him to take: he went to the office of Murphy, the lawyer with whom Biggs had held his interview earlier in the day.

"I expected to meet my old friend, Mr. O'Kane," was his explanation when he found himself in the presence of the village dignitary, "but I'm afraid I missed him."

"If you expected to meet him in this office it is very evident you have done so," was the reply of the counselor, who scanned his visitor as though he recollected seeing him before.

"No doubt of that; can you tell me where I may find him?"

"Isn't he at the hotel?"

"No; I left there a few minutes ago, and they told me he had gone to New York."

"Then why do you come *here* for him?"

"I thought he might have left some word."

"If he had done so, I would hardly communicate it to the late watchman of the Berwyck Bank, even though he manages to pose before the town as a hero and most people believe he had no criminal knowledge of the little affair of last night."

This was in the nature of a knockdown argument, and, imperturbable as Kneeland Ely generally was, he was offended by the slur cast upon him.

"Any one who holds the belief you have hinted at, Mr. Murphy, is as great a scoundrel as your clients, which remark has a personal application so far as you are concerned."

"If you have any business with me, sir, I refuse to listen to it, and the sooner you leave this office the better."

"I shall go when I am through. A pettifogger has too hard work to earn his bread and butter to give any consideration to the character of his clients or the justice of their cases."

"That remark is warranted by your own presence in my office. But I decline to take your case."

"It is easy to decline that which has not been offered. I have not yet got so low as to appeal to you for help."

"Nor I so low as to give it."

"Well," added Ely, rising from his chair, "I wish you good luck in defending a lot of the worst criminals that ever afflicted this country. I have no doubt it is congenial work."

"Far better than defending one who seizes a person on the street that is as peaceable as Mayor Herkins himself, and whose character is far superior to his who accuses him."

It was apparent that Lawyer Murphy and Volney Biggs had been discussing the proceedings of the night before, which resulted in the capture and incarceration of Bike Warner.

"No doubt you will earn your fee, Mr. Murphy, but your clients have less money to waste upon defenders like you than they would have had I not helped to bring their schemes to naught."

"An honest man is always assured of the means of defense, while a dishonest person needs twice as much to clear himself—a fact which you would do well to bear in mind. But I have no wish to waste any more time upon you."

"And I am sorry that I have already wasted more valuable time than yours."

"Oblige me, then, by leaving."

"Good-day, sir."

The lawyer made no response, and Kneeland Ely withdrew, feeling that in this interview, at least, he had emerged at "the little end of the horn."

CHAPTER XIII.

"THIS KNOCKS EVERYTHING TOPSY-TURVY!"

DESPITE the hard sense of Kneeland Ely, and in the face of his strong fight against it, a dreadful suspicion began taking shape in his mind.

It was in effect that Volney Biggs was either innocent of the strange disappearance of Detective Pixley, or, at the most, was no more than a *particeps criminis* therein. In other words, Frank Dixon, the suspected bookkeeper of the bank, was the guilty person.

This, at first thought, was so violent a supposition that Ely dismissed it with a feeling of self-scorn that he should have allowed it to enter his mind. But it came again and again until it secured an abiding-place in his brain, and he was compelled to turn it over in all its bearings.

There were a hundred facts against it and only a few in its favor, but these few outweighed all the others.

Let a man in the situation of Kneeland Ely once start upon a line of speculation, and the labyrinth becomes intricate, involved and endless, with the result that all is a hopeless tangle beyond his power to unravel.

It is useless to follow the theories which became a veritable torment to him; we have only to trace actions and their results.

Now that Volney Biggs had withdrawn, for the time at least, Ely decided to give attention to Mr. Dixon.

He had learned from Pixley of the singular conduct of the young man on the night that President Dillingham visited Ely, when the latter was serving as watchman in the bank. In what manner Dixon and Biggs could be jointly concerned in the taking off of Pixley passed comprehension, but, as has been said, the suspicion that such was the case approached almost conviction.

Kneeland Ely was in sore need of sleep. He had had little slumber for the past forty-eight hours. It was unwise to presume too far upon his endurance. He therefore flung himself on his bed, and, with that fortunate gift which a few men possess, sank into a rest that was never broken until night had come. Then he awoke, and, descending the stairs to the dining-room, ate a full meal and became as a giant refreshed with new wine.

His next step was to go to his old boarding-place,

where his trunk remained, and don a complete change of clothing. He had become so well known in town because of his connection with the arrest of the burglars that this was necessary to avoid bothersome recognition.

He did not wish to be stopped on the street every few minutes with congratulations and inquiries.

Fairly outside of the house, he sauntered to the outskirts, passing beyond the furthest house. There, when certain that no one saw him, he made a still greater change in his personal appearance. He fastened a pair of bushy whiskers in place, carried a cane and walked with a slight limp, depressing his shoulders as though weighed down by a score of years more than belonged to him.

This disguise, as has already been stated, was complete so long as it was not subjected to scrutiny by day or the glare of a strong artificial light. Nothing could serve his purpose better when helped by the gloom on the street. No fear now of any one taking him for the new watchman that resigned his situation, as may be said, amid a blaze of glory.

It was between nine and ten o'clock when Ely strolled by the home of Frank Dixon. He had no reason to expect anything in the way of discovery, but it may be said he took the course without any special object in view.

A dim light was burning in the upper room, which he had learned belonged to the young man.

"He is out and is not likely to return for a time," was the conclusion of the watcher, who continued his stroll toward the residence of President Dillingham, that being the most likely spot to find the bookkeeper in case he wished to meet him.

A bright illumination in the sitting-room of the bank-

er's house was good evidence that Ely was correct in this theory.

That being so, what good could the knowledge do him?

But when opposite the house the front door opened, and President Dillingham, cane in hand, came down the graveled walk and turned to the right, which was toward the open country.

"He wishes to take a stroll before going to bed," was the conclusion of Ely, who wheeled and kept pace with him on the other side of the street.

The gentleman walked slowly, so that Ely could not maintain himself abreast of him without attracting notice. So he gradually forged ahead; and, as it would have been still more suspicious to follow him out of town, the limping individual crossed the street and turned back over his own route.

This brought the couple face to face in the light of a lamp at the corner.

Secure in his own disguise, Ely looked up in the countenance of the banker, who merely glanced at him, with a neighborly nod of his head.

Kneeland Ely was struck by the expression of anguish on the face of President Dillingham. He seemed ready to sink under the weight of some overwhelming sorrow. The sigh and half-suppressed groan that accompanied these evidences of grief added emphasis to them.

"Poor man! The blow hurts him more than any of his friends suspect. Can it be he has an inkling of the truth? Does he see that the happiness, and life itself, of his favorite niece is wrapped up in this hateful mystery? Does he know that when the solution comes it means disgrace worse than death?"

The comprehension of the distress caused by the perfidy

of one individual, he who had been accepted as a trusted friend and as the suitor of the young lady's hand, filled Ely with a deep resentment toward Dixon. If he could have seen the way open to punish him without making the innocent suffer he would have eagerly done so.

But alas! in the affairs of this life it is the innocent who suffer more than the guilty.

A block further, and Ely looked around. Mr. Dillingham, if he had set out for the country, changed his mind. He was standing motionless, as though undecided what to do. Ely slowed his pace as much as was prudent, but the last glance he cast backward showed the lone old man as immovable as the lamp-post beside him.

Yielding to a feeling of uneasiness, Ely slipped across the street, intending to return and keep an eye on the banker. It might be he contemplated doing violence to himself.

But the scrutiny already given to Mr. Dillingham prevented Ely noting, until he started across the street, that another person was doing what he had in view. A man was coming from the direction of the banker's residence, and walking so slowly that it was clear that his interest was centered in the old gentleman.

Had Ely observed him before starting, he would have kept on his own side, but, having made the move, he pushed on. Thus he had to walk but a short way when he met the second individual.

It was not beneath the glare of the lamplight, as in the former instance, but aid like that was not needed for Ely to recognize the newcomer on the scene as Frank Dixon, the bookkeeper of the bank. It was he who was keeping his chief under surveillance.

"And no wonder," was the thought of Ely; "a guilty conscience turns shadows into armed men."

Dixon hardly bestowed a glance upon the limping man with the cane, but peered through the gloom at the dimly outlined figure in the distance.

It was easy for Ely to keep track of the movements of the younger, who came to a pause a little further on, evidently afraid of being noticed if he advanced closer.

That was the tableau—the old man, silent, thoughtful, motionless, beneath the glare of the lamp; the younger, still as a statue in the gloom, dimly seeing, and yet intently watching, the other.

Kneeland added himself to the scene by halting also, but at such a distance that he would not have been able to locate Dixon had he not done so before the space between them became so great.

This distribution of characters brought about another condition: Ely had stopped almost in front of the residence of Mr. Dillingham, so that by shifting his gaze he was given a good view of that building.

The light was still burning in the reception-room, and in the gloom of the piazza he made out the figure of a young lady, whose interest doubtless centered in the two persons that had gone out of the house only a few minutes before.

The interpretation of the whole scene could not have been plainer.

The banker, for some reason, had left his home at a later hour than usual. It might have been for a simple stroll, and it might mean much more.

His niece and her lover were startled by his action, and the latter had set out to note the movements of the elder.

That was what he was engaged in doing, while she, in

her anxiety, could not remain inside the house until the return of the watcher.

There was a flicker under the distant lamp. The figure of the banker was revealed for a moment, and then lost to sight again in the shadows. He had resumed his walk, but instead of going out in the country was returning home.

Hardly had he started, when Dixon imitated him. Ely was only a second or two later in doing the same, so that Banker Dillingham, at the further end of the line, controlled the whole machinery.

A brief walk brought the young man opposite the house which he had left a brief while before. He did not cross and re-enter, as Ely expected him to do, but emitted a vigorous cough.

Immediately the door was opened, and Miss Crosslands passed out of sight. She understood the signal to mean that her uncle was coming back, and she and her lover separated for the night.

Ely did not deem it wise to hasten his pace. He had acted his part so well that no suspicion was directed toward him. Thus it was that he had not gone far when Dixon passed him at a brisk gait.

Ely put forth a little more energy, but the young man drew away from him so rapidly that he quickly disappeared.

"There's no need of my hurrying, for he is going home and to bed. Nevertheless, I will give his house a farewell glance."

At the moment of turning the corner Ely observed that the light in the room of the bookkeeper was burning brightly—proof that he had returned and was doubtless preparing to retire. Dropping back to his slow pace, the

late watchman moved along the street so as to pass in front of the building, as he had done the night before.

Kneeland Ely was generally on the alert, and it was fortunate that he was so in this instance. It was his intention to halt when opposite the little cottage and wait until the light in the upper story was extinguished.

But, to his astonishment, he discovered that a third party was ahead of him. Within the shadow of the door that had sheltered Detective Fagan was a man, evidently with his attention fixed upon the home of Dixon.

He was so deep in the shadow that Ely barely distinguished him, his notice having been attracted by a slight noise caused by a change of posture. Though the discovery was unexpected, Ely kept up his slow, regular pace, apparently looking straight ahead and noting nothing to the right or left.

But for the faint noise referred to he would have known nothing of the eavesdropper's presence, which doubtless had a significance of its own.

"Well," muttered Ely, after reaching a safe distance, "matters are becoming more mixed than ever. Who can that fellow be, and what is his business there?"

The lame man made as if to turn the other corner, doing so for a few paces and immediately coming far enough back to see down the street he had just left.

At that moment the bright light in Dixon's room went out and all became darkness. The stillness of the deserted street enabled Ely to hear the rapid footfalls of the watcher across the way, beginning at the very moment succeeding the extinguishment of the light.

Ely stood a few seconds in doubt, supposing the stranger was coming toward him; but the figure, as shown by lamplight, was walking fast in the opposite direction.

"He must not get away from me," was the decision of the watcher, who set out after him at a sharper pace than he had shown that evening.

The instant the one ahead vanished around the first corner the pursuer's gait rose still higher, until it approached a trot. He was sure he would be upon the heels of the other when he, too, turned the corner.

A disappointment, however, awaited him. Whether or not the man feared pursuit cannot be told, but he must have broken into a run so much superior to the pace of Ely that, instead of the latter drawing up near him, the fugitive, as he may be called, was nowhere in sight.

Angry with himself at the trick, Ely listened intently, hoping to catch the sound of the other's footfalls. But had he been miles out in the country the silence could not have been more profound than it was at that moment in that portion of the town of Berwyck.

"To-night's work is a failure," was the disgusted conclusion of Ely; "I will send to New York for half a dozen amateur detectives and let them try their hand. They surely can't do any worse than I have."

In his self-reproach Kneeland Ely did injustice to himself.

It was not yet midnight, but it seemed useless for him to remain abroad any longer. Dixon, the man whom he had set out to watch, had retired and would not be seen again until the morrow, when the hour came to resume his duties at the bank.

The baffled Ely dropped back to his usual gait, but, with characteristic caution, maintained his halt gait.

The house of President Dillingham was wrapped in profound darkness. No one was astir, though Kneeland

Ely was right in believing that two persons at least beneath that roof would not close their eyes until far into the hours of the night, and even then sleep would be feverish, fitful and tormented by the most frightful fears, misgivings and dreams that ever come to youth or age.

To avoid unpleasant complications, Ely slipped off his false beard and showed it into his pocket before reaching the hotel. He managed also to recover from his lameness and entered looking very much, except as to attire, as he looked upon his arrival in Berwyck.

It was still comparatively early for him, and, after his rest during the afternoon, he felt no disposition to sleep. Nevertheless, he went to his room, paying little attention to the few loungers below stairs, and without a glance at the register of the hotel.

Had he scanned the written page of that book he would have learned something of importance.

Twenty-four hours and more had now gone by since the disappearance of Detective Pixley, and his friend had not picked up the first clew to his fate.

He not only knew absolutely nothing, but was more perplexed than ever. He felt like roaming over the town the night through, and would have done so could he have felt the least assurance of accomplishing anything by such action.

"Pix is dead," was his disheartening conclusion, "and he particulars of his taking off may never be known."

As a partial relief from his mental distress, he brought forth the papers which the detective had obtained when he made his call at the house of President Dillingham. It will be remembered that they contained the handwriting not only of himself but of his bookkeeper. With the papers also was the slip that had been shoved under the

door of the bank on the night that Ely and Pixley were doing watch within.

Ely had given these a superficial examination when his friend first placed them before him, with the idea of instituting a comparison. As a relief from his worriment he now concentrated his faculties into a minute and studied comparison of the penmanship.

It was inevitable that in the former instance he and Pixley, approaching the task with a preconceived theory, reached, as a result, the confirmation of that theory. The effect of this conclusion was upon Ely when he repeated the task.

But suddenly he uttered a suppressed exclamation. A discovery came with a power that stunned him.

At first it was a suspicion only, but it broke like a thunderclap from the sunlit sky, and held him breathless and unable for a time to go on with his task. He sprang to his feet and paced the floor. Then he lighted another cigar and puffed like a steam engine.

When he had partly composed himself he resumed his seat and spread out the papers once more on the stand before him, underneath the gaslight.

"By heavens! it's TRUE!" he exclaimed, a minute later, leaping again to his feet and pacing the room like a caged lion; "this knocks everything topsy-turvy!"

CHAPTER XIV.

"HERE HE IS!"

A THIRD time Kneeland Ely sat down to the little table in his room. He had now acquired mastery over himself

and was the same cool, collected individual that followed so rigorously the trail of the fleeing Bike Warner.

He sat with his shoulder to the light, and, leaning back in his chair, scrutinized the papers for fully ten minutes, his whole mental strength concentrated upon and absorbed in the effort.

When he was through he carefully folded and placed them in an inner pocket, where he meant to guard them with his life.

"*The secret is solved,*" was his conclusion, elevating his feet on the window-sill and puffing his cigar with more deliberation. "Strange that nothing like that ever came to Pix or me; I see it all now."

One of the facts connected with a task like that of Kneeland Ely's has already been referred to. A detective often sets out with a theory to which he attempts to fit the facts as they afterward come to life. The odd thing about this process is that it is generally quite easy to make these facts dovetail to perfection. In the end the structure seems to be complete.

Then comes the demolishment of the superstructure; the foundation was wrong, and everything built upon it topples over with one grand crash.

The true foundation now assumes shape, and not a flaw shows in the building erected thereon.

Looking back over the events of the past few days, Kneeland Ely saw their perfect conformity to the astounding discovery he had just made. None of the slight difficulties which confronted him before now showed themselves; everything was smooth, clean, clear, complete.

It was a fine exploit, a great triumph, but his heart sank as he realized that all this had not the remotest bearing upon the fate of his missing friend.

That awful problem remained unsolved. The wall which interposed itself across his path was as insurmountable as ever.

Sh!

Surely that was a noise in the room adjoining—the one which had been occupied by Pixley Fagan two nights before.

Ely's heart gave a quick throb of hope at the thought that his friend had returned. He was on the point of leaping to his feet and dashing into the apartment, ready in his delight to fall upon his neck and embrace him.

But his habit of caution restrained him. Better to wait until all doubt on the question was removed.

Everything remained quiet for a brief while. Pixley softly arose and again pressed his ear against the separating wall.

Yes; some one was in the other room, moving softly about—proof that it was not the rightful occupant, for there could be no call for such precaution on his part.

As if his wits had been preternaturally sharpened by his late mental exploit, Kneeland Ely jumped to the conclusion—

"It's Volney Biggs! It was he who was watching the house of Frank Dixon; he has come back to the hotel and has sneaked into Pix's room. It strikes me that it is about time I took part in this business."

He held his revolver in a firm grasp as he noiselessly opened his own door and stepped into the hallway. The gleam shining through the crevices beneath the other door showed that the intruder was availing himself of the benefit of gaslight.

Gently seizing the door-knob, Ely tried it. As he sus-

pected, it was not locked. Then he shoved the door inward, so quickly that it gave out no noise.

The man was standing just then with his back toward the entrance, examining some papers that he had taken from the valise on the floor, and which had been opened by means of one of his false keys.

"*Ahem!*"

Ely cleared his throat as an announcement that he had arrived. The intruder started with the nervous movement natural to a person when detected doing something wrong. He wheeled about and confronted the visitor, who instantly demonstrated that he was master of the situation.

For the extended arm of Kneeland Ely held his revolver at a dead level with the muzzle aimed straight at the other's face. The finger needed but to press a little harder on the trigger to send home the pellet of lead.

"The first movement to draw and I fire!"

The words were spoken in a low voice, but were as distinct as if shouted through a trumpet. The pose of the conqueror was sufficient without the gleam of his keen eye to show his deadly earnestness.

Standing thus, Ely reached back with his left hand and reclosed the door. The two were now alone in the room.

There was no call to order his captive to throw up his hands; that was unnecessary under the circumstances. He was as helpless as if bound with chains, and knew that the first movement toward drawing a weapon would be fatal to him.

"Volney Biggs, *alias* John O'Kane, or, more properly, Thomas R. Belden, you are my prisoner," said Kneeland Ely.

It was impossible for any one to be caught more fairly than was the individual thus addressed. Anticipating nothing of the kind, the similar weapon which he carried still reposed in his hip pocket. In his start he dropped the paper in his hand to the floor, and, staring open-mouthed at Ely, faltered:

"Wha-a-at do you want?"

"Sit down."

"Wha-a-t for?"

"Because I order you. *Sit down!*"

He was near the window, and close enough to a chair to obey without shifting his position. He did as commanded, dropping into the seat almost in a state of collapse. Sitting thus, he still confronted the leveled weapon, which followed his motion so that the muzzle held relatively the same position as before.

"Now, Volney, let's understand each other," continued Ely, in the same off-hand manner he had shown from the first. "You can see that I have the drop on you. Do as you are told and you won't be hurt; try to draw, and I pull the trigger. You know what *that* means."

The villain rapidly regained his self-possession.

"I don't deny what you say, but what's the use of keeping that thing pointed like that? It might go off accidentally."

"I'm too used to it to have any accidents."

"But it isn't necessary; you can keep the drop without having it all the time leveled like that. It makes me nervous."

"I'll compromise," said Ely, taking a step forward and sitting down, but doing so without removing his gaze from the face of the other.

At the same moment he lowered his hand so that it rested on his knee. The position was less constrained, and could be held for a long time without tiring his arm. Nevertheless, the weapon was so placed that any movement on the part of the prisoner could be instantly anticipated.

"Volney, do you know me?" asked Ely, with a smile that displayed his fine white teeth.

The other, who had been looking intently in his face, flushed and uttered a savage imprecation.

"That answers my question; enough said. It signifies that we understand each other."

"I don't see what you can do with a man who gets into a wrong room by mistake," remarked Biggs, with a weak attempt at facetiousness.

"Not much, that is true, and if it was all I had I wouldn't bother you; but there's that little matter of last December with the bank at Phœnixville, and the affair of those forged notes in Philadelphia by which you and your friends netted a handsome sum, to say nothing of the train robbery in Arkansas last autumn, when the express messenger lost his life. You haven't forgotten those, Volney, I am sure."

"What are they to you? What proof have you that I had anything to do with them?"

"Enough to produce a couple of warrants for your arrest. Those warrants are in my pocket. Phœnixville happens to be in this State, so I won't have to wait for requisition papers."

It was a discouraging piece of information to Mr. Biggs, and, knowing the man before him, he ceased his attempts at bluffing.

"Well, Len, you've got me dead to rights this time," he said, settling sullenly back in his chair. "What are you going to do about it?"

"That depends upon *you*."

This was an altogether surprising reply. Biggs accepted it as signifying that the other, like too many persons, was open to a proposition. The chance was eagerly seized.

"Now you are talking sense. You'll find I'll act on the square, old fellow. How much will it cost me?"

"What can you pay?"

"How does five thousand strike you?"

"You can afford to do better."

"Don't be too rough on a poor orphan," said Biggs, who, seeing a prospect of release from an awkward dilemma, was disposed to be jocular; "you know I am poor but honest."

"You won't feel ten thousand."

Biggs whistled softly and expanded his eyes.

"That's easily earned; but all right, it's a go, if you say so."

"I haven't said so," remarked Ely.

The couple never once removed their eyes from each other's faces while talking. The remark of Kneeland Ely awakened a sudden distrust on the part of his captive.

"It isn't fair to treat a fellow like that, Len; I would be square with you if our positions were different."

"Volney," said the other, in the same low, business-like voice, which could hardly have been heard in the next room, "I won't let you off for five, nor for ten, nor for one hundred thousand dollars. I have had plenty of such chances before to-night and haven't taken any of them yet."

"What did you mean, then, by saying what you did?" demanded the scowling ruffian, who would have given the sum named for the chance of leaping at the throat of Kneeland Ely.

"I mean what I said. I won't compound a felony in the way you have in mind, but I will, for the first time in my life, do it, provided you pay me in another way."

"I don't understand you."

"Produce Pixley Fagan, well and alive, and you will be free from any molestation from me for any and everything done previous to this night. We'll wipe it off the slate and begin anew to-morrow."

Kneeland Ely bent all his faculties to a study of the miscreant's countenance while repeating these words.

He knew his offer would be accepted, but it was by no means certain that Volney Biggs would be able to carry out his part of the agreement. He could lose nothing and would have a chance of gaining everything by making the required pledge.

The all-important question remained as to Biggs's ability to do anything of the nature required.

It was not impossible that he knew nothing of the missing officer. Ely, however, believed that he did. At any rate, he was ready to act upon that supposed fact.

An indescribable expression passed over the face of the cunning villain. Kneeland Ely had seen nothing of the kind in all his experience. He could not fathom its meaning, nor did he attempt to do so.

"What makes you fancy I know anything of your friend, Pixley Fagan?"

"I have only a suspicion; if you don't, why, the matter is ended, and I'll march you down to the lock-up and let you join Paff and Hake and Bike."

"I haven't denied that I have the knowledge you're after, Len," was the significant remark of the prisoner.

"Understand that my proposition is that you produce Pix well and unharmed—nothing less than *that* will answer."

"I'll agree he shall be alive, but suppose you leave out the condition of being 'unharmed.'"

The significance of this remark sent a chill through the frame of Kneeland Ely, for it clearly implied that Detective Fagan had suffered grievous injury. Indeed, Ely felt he ought to have suspected that, for the brave fellow would have been heard from before had he not been disabled through some attack.

"Well, say the injury is not fatal; that will answer."

"I can agree to that proposition, but you wouldn't expect me to bring him *here?*"

"No; you are to take me to him."

"If I do that, you pledge me that it is a stand-off between us?"

"I give you my pledge, which I have never broken."

"Let that drop; you and I haven't much to brag of in *that* line."

"So far as you are concerned you are correct. We understand the terms of the bargain."

"But I have got to trust you, Len."

"Show me any way of getting around that phase and possibly I will adopt it."

"How far will you trust *me?*"

"Not out of my sight."

"When do you want to be taken to him?"

"This night; will you do it?"

"Yes; but, see here, I don't intend to walk downstairs at the point of that gun."

"You needn't; I will put it in my coat pocket, but keep fast to it, so that if you try any trick I can fire through the coat with certain aim."

"And what about *my* gun?"

"You may keep it. Being my guide, you will walk ahead. If you can use it any quicker than I you are welcome to do so. Are the conditions accepted?"

"They are, for you leave me no choice."

"Now that that contract is made, I would like to ask a question or two."

"I am listening."

"You were in this affair with Higgens, Hoover and Warner?"

Volney Biggs bowed his head, with a smile of pride in the confession.

"I was 'in' it, too, with both feet, but what the mischief did you do? I knew you were in town, for I saw you on Main Street, just at dusk yesterday afternoon, but Higgens and Hoover were the only ones inside the bank, and Warner was the only other one of your friends in the neighborhood. I ask again, what it was *you* did in the way of help?"

The smile on the face of Volney Biggs assumed a sinister meaning as he uttered the reply:

"The bargain that you and I have just made is sufficient answer to *that* question."

"I might have known it," said Ely, trying to conceal the shudder that passed over him.

"You expected me to show up, and I didn't; you expected Pix to be on hand, but he wasn't. Put this and that together, and you have the information you seek."

Kneeland Ely nodded his head. Nothing could be plainer than that.

"Rather lucky for me," added Biggs, "for they can't bring anything against me, so far as this little town is concerned."

"You are right, but the documents in my possession render that unnecessary; I rely upon *them*."

"And they are to be laid away, from this night forth?"

"So far as I am concerned, yes, provided you perform your part of the contract. Let me ask, for our guidance, whether this excursion of ours will occupy much time?"

Biggs hesitated a moment.

"I am not sure as to that; it depends."

"A half-hour—an hour—two hours?"

The prisoner grinned knowingly. He did not mean to give away any advantage he now possessed.

"Say a half-hour, if we walk briskly."

"There's no reason why we should not; it is so late that few people are on the street, and there will be nothing in our appearance to attract attention, unless you make a break."

"Having implicit faith in your honor, nothing will induce me to try anything of that sort. I am at your service, but, before starting, let's make sure everything is understood between us: I am to take you to where Pixley Fagan is waiting to see you or some friend?"

"Yes."

"And then I depart, and henceforth we are quits, so far as events up to this evening are concerned?"

"Yes, if Pixley Fagan is found alive and not mortally hurt."

"Enough said; I will take you to him—"

"There's no need of that. Here he is!"

It was Pixley Fagan who uttered these words, as he strode into the room where the two men sat.

CHAPTER XV.

"I'VE STAYED TOO LONG."

AFTER bidding good-day to Kneeland Ely, late in the afternoon preceding the last attempt upon the Berwyck Bank, Detective Fagan strolled off in the direction of the hotel.

It will be remembered that a full understanding was

had between the two friends as to the respective parts they were to play in the events that were then only a few hours distant.

It was growing dusk when Fagan walked into the public room of the hotel. While passing through the door he encountered a man coming out whom he recognized as Volney Biggs. Neither showed a sign of knowing the other, and the officer was confident that Biggs did not identify him.

In the most natural manner Fagan turned about and watched the criminal. He crossed the street and turned to the left. In order to keep in sight the officer did the same, staying far enough to the rear to prevent his errand being suspected in case the other should look around or retrace his steps.

Biggs's course convinced his follower that he did not know the detective was shadowing him.

The one in advance continued onward, turning several corners until he speedily reached the outskirts of the small town.

This fact added to the delicacy of the work Fagan had taken upon himself, for both were soon beyond the line of promenade frequented by the townspeople.

Believing he was on the eve of an important discovery, the pursuer held back until his man hovered on the line of invisibility, his shadowy figure dimly seen as it moved forward at a moderate walk.

Fully a hundred yards from the highway, among a clump of trees, the detective fancied he saw the outlines of a house. He had never been in that vicinity before, but like a flash he associated the building with the business of the man whom he was following.

He was right. Biggs turned sharply to the right, and was observed more distinctly as he walked along what seemed to be the remains of a path and disappeared in the gloom of the trees.

"That old building is the headquarters of the burglars," was the conclusion of the detective. "I wish Ely, as he calls himself, was with me, but as it is I will undertake a little investigation of my own."

Nothing would have been more imprudent than to follow directly in the footsteps of Volney Biggs. He and his friends were sure to keep a lookout for prowlers, and would discover Fagan the moment he made a change of direction.

Accordingly, the detective walked past the place, hardly turning his head, when opposite, though it need not be said he used his eyes to the utmost.

It was as he supposed. A low, broad stone building stood in the grove, a structure that had probably been erected before any house in the present town of Berwyck. It was unoccupied, except by the "squatters" that had taken possession while planning the robbery of the bank.

A short distance to the rear of the building wound a brook that was lined with trees. The stream was several feet below the level of the surrounding land, and, crossing the road, was crossed in turned by Fagan, after passing further along the highway.

A little way in this direction brought the wooded hollow between him and the old house, thus affording the screen necessary in carrying out the plan he had formed.

Fagan vaulted over the fence, hurried along the edge of the wood, and in a few minutes placed himself behind the structure that had assumed so much interest for him.

He found that between it and the nearest point of the hollow was an open space of a hundred feet in extent. This grass-grown plot had to be crossed in order to reach the building itself.

The nearer view of the old stone building left no doubt of its great age. It had probably been deserted for a score of years, and no doubt was in a dilapidated condition. The surrounding trees were so scattered that, despite their exuberant vegetation at that season of the year, the structure was seen distinctly.

Nothing, however, could be effected without a closer view. From where the detective stood not a sign of life was observable. All the windows were dark, and the stillness of the tomb rested on the scene.

But Pixley Fagan was not the man to hesitate when once he had decided upon his course of action.

With his head low, like an Indian scout, he ran rapidly and lightly across the open space and entered the grove immediately surrounding the old house.

Then he began what may be called his fine work.

With the utmost care he made a circuit of the building, coming back to the point from which he set out. The shadows gave him good protection, for the night had advanced while he was thus employed, and the bright moon would not show itself until later in the evening.

Not the first evidence of life was observed during his circumnavigation of the mysterious building. That one man at least was inside he was certain.

While still debating upon the right course to take he heard the sound of voices.

Fagan stealthily shifted his position in the direction whence came the murmur, and saw three men approaching from the highway over the same course that had been followed by Volney Biggs a short time before.

There could be no mistake as to their identity; they were Paff Higgens, Hake Hoover and Bike Warner. Inasmuch as Biggs had preceded them, the whole party doubtless meant to hold a council of war on the eve, as may be said, of battle.

They entered the broad, tumble-down front door without hindrance, and the muffled words came from within, though nothing that was said could be identified.

Then took place a singular occurrence. A light flashed to view in the large middle room on the lower floor. It need hardly be said that the windows were without curtains, and most of the panes were gone. There were two windows opening on the right and the same number on the left. On one of the other sides of the room a door communicated with the kitchen, and on the remaining side with the broad hall leading to the front door.

Paff Higgens found some sort of seat at one of the windows on the left, and Hake Hoover did the same on the right. This, it will be seen, commanded every possible view of the outside, and shut off any attempt on the part

of Fagan playing the eavesdropper by slipping forward and crouching under one of the windows.

Evidently the cautious criminals had taken these positions to make sure that no one should steal a march upon them. Warner and Biggs kept away from the windows and nearer the middle of the room, since there was no need of their playing the sentinel.

Only two avenues remained to the detective, that of entering the building from the rear or the front.

The bravest man might well shrink from either attempt, for it was virtually entering the lion's den, with every chance on the side of the lion. But Pixley Fagan decided to take the risk.

Favored by the gloom among the trees, he easily passed beyond sight of the watchman at the windows, and approached the kitchen part of the building. An old door, with a single stone step, opened into this, the interior of the kitchen being in utter darkness.

A close approach revealed the old form of entrance. Instead of the modern latch or lock, a string dangled through an aperture that had probably been bored a century before. As in the days of our forefathers, a twitch of the latchstring opened the way to the interior of the building, while the door was locked by drawing in the string.

Fagan softly pulled the leathern thong and the latch was lifted. When he pushed against the door, however, there was no yielding. He tried it until convinced it was fastened on the inside by some other means.

Hobson's choice remained; he must enter by the front, or leave without accomplishing anything.

With a temerity approaching foolhardiness, Detective Fagan set about his perilous task.

His action was almost a crime, inasmuch as there was no necessity for any such frightful personal risk as he now took upon himself.

The "programme" for the evening had been made out. It was certain that these four men would try to rob the Berwyck Bank before the rising of the morrow's sun. The measures intended to defeat them had been agreed

upon; it was not necessary to know more, to say nothing of the great risk Fagan ran of upsetting everything by his rashness.

All the same, however, he set about the task with hardly a minute's hesitation.

Two broad, flat stones served as the steps to the front entrance. Here the massive door was ordinarily opened and shut by the old-fashioned iron latch, below which, on the inside, were the huge bolts and cross-pieces by which the entrance was rendered almost as secure as the solid walls themselves.

The criminals within might well deem it unnecessary to lock the main or outer door. Surely no one would attempt to enter by that means, while any other approach would be detected at once. The rear being secured, they might well believe that anything they said was safe against eavesdroppers.

Detective Fagan held himself ready to flee on the moment it should become necessary. If he could not avoid alarming those within, he could dash down the weedy walk to the highway, and thence in the direction of the town. The plotters would hardly dare follow him, and if they did, he was confident of surpassing their best efforts.

With the utmost care he raised the latch and held it suspended under the pressure of his thumb. So far as he could tell, not the slightest noise was produced. Then he shoved the door inward. It moved backward as if the hinges had been newly oiled. The darkness of the wide hall yawned before him, while a yellow line of light along the floor located the closed door leading to the large room where the four men were seated.

He not only heard them laugh and speak, but distinguished several words that were uttered. It looked as if fate was favoring the officer, who now closed the door with the utmost care behind him. This he was able to do with the same noiselessness as he had opened it.

Although he was in a place he had never before seen, and with the impenetrable darkness on every hand, he

had a general idea of his surroundings and of the right thing to do.

It must not be supposed that Pixley Fagan did not comprehend the risk he was running by his daring act. Sooner or later the four men would complete their council and leave the building, to do which they must come through the hall along which he was advancing like a cat. If they made this move suddenly they would be upon him before he could escape. In a conflict with four such desperate men he could have no earthly show. If he should attempt to run he would become the target for all their revolvers before he could reach the highway.

But Fagan indulged in some exceedingly fine theorizing.

Hours must pass before a move was made against the bank. Nothing was more likely than that the quartette meant to stay where they were until eleven o'clock, if not later.

If for any reason they changed their minds, or had already formed a different intention, the listener would be able to gain ample notice of it from their conversation.

This was the theory that sustained him while advancing with the caution of one who feels he carries his life in his hand.

When almost close enough to touch the inner door the detective stopped. He had gone so near that every word uttered was intelligible. He even withdrew a step or two toward the entrance.

As may be supposed, the conversation was extremely interesting to the man who had run all this risk to overhear it.

It was Paff Higgens who said:

"It doesn't look as if a single person in town suspects us. I've kept my eyes open ever since we've been here and seen nothing."

"Why should you?" asked Hake Hoover, "when it isn't to be seen? This is the finest job we've had in a long time. I was in the bank to-day and took a view of the safe."

"What sort is it?" asked Warner.

"The old-fashioned kind; it's as easy to open as a watermelon."

"Do you 'spose there's much in there?"

"Enough to pay us, if we get our hands on it."

"It was lucky we struck this town," remarked Higgens; "nothing could suit better, or half as well."

"I came up last week, you know," observed Volney Biggs, "and looked around. It took some time to learn what I wanted, but I got it at last. Whom do you suppose this old hulk belongs to?"

The others could not form a guess.

"That old watchman at the bank. I met him the other day, when he was out to look at it, and got him interested by pretending I thought of buying it. He showed me all through, and is anxious to sell. He said it was built by his great-grandfather before the Revolution, and nobody has lived in it for twenty-five years. He can't rent it, and no person will buy it at any price."

"You managed to get the provisions in here without any one seeing you, Biggs?"

"That was easy after I learned all the ins and outs of the old building. I could stroll out this way after dark and leave a little of the stuff at a time. Besides, this crowd stands more in need of drinkables than of eatables. That made less trouble, you see."

"Especially when you carried most of the drinkables *inside*," was the facetious observation of Bike Warner.

"Of course they were carried inside, all of them, and I notice you have done your part in placing yourself outside of the same."

"We can all plead guilty to that," was the comment of Bike Warner.

"Now," said Higgens, "it is understood that as soon as the affair is over we all come back here and stay for several days."

"You think that is the best plan?"

"By long odds; the news will be telegraphed to-morrow to New York and other points, and the detectives will be after us hot-footed. They will watch the railway

stations, scour the country and hunt everywhere except right here in this old building in this old town."

"The safest place after cracking a safe," philosophized Bike Warner, "is in the house next door."

"We will keep out of sight; that is, all except Biggs, who mustn't be too previous with himself, and then when the way is clear steal off one by one and come together, as we get the chance, at the Hole in the Wall."

Detective Fagan, who did not lose a word of this edifying conversation, felt he was being repaid for his risk.

"Volney is the master of ceremonies," added Hake Hoover, "and is used to the business, so he need not make any mistake."

"Suppose there's a slip to-night?"

"*There won't be.* That watchman is the stupidest dolt I ever met; we won't have any trouble with him, and that's all we need fear."

"Shall we drink to the success of the scheme?" asked Warner.

"No," was the prompt response of Higgens, who seemed to be the leader in the enterprise. "We must have no muddled brains to-night. You've got to stand watch, and mustn't see double."

"But after the thing is over and we are here, what then?"

"Then will be time enough to drink to the success of what we have done, not of what is left to do."

"And we are to stay here until it's time to move?"

"That's the idea."

At that moment the listening detective fancied he heard the door leading into the kitchen opened. The noise was slight, but it disturbed him. He stood a few seconds, hesitating whether to withdraw or stay. He ought to have gone, for surely he had learned sufficient, but the words of the party proved they intended to wait several hours, and, unfortunately, he decided to listen a little longer.

"It's tedious business," said Bike Warner.

"Do you know of anything that pays better?" was the

pert inquiry of Higgens. "You ought to understand that one of the virtues of our profession is patience."

Just then Detective Fagan heard a faint disturbance at the front door behind him. He turned his head, but of course could see nothing in the gloom, nor did he detect any additional sound.

"I've stayed too long," was his conclusion, as he moved with less care than before along the hall.

Seizing the latch, he drew smartly backward. The door did not respond. He tried harder than before, but it did not yield the fraction of an inch.

Convinced of treachery, he turned to ascend the stairs which the sense of feeling had apprised him ran up one side of the hall; but before he could reach them, the inner door was drawn inward and a stream of light swept over him.

In the blinding glare he saw himself confronted by three men, each with a leveled weapon, and he recognized the gruff command of Paff Higgens:

"*Hands up!*"

Even while the words were uttered the outer door also opened behind him, and Volney Biggs approached from the rear.

Detective Fagan was fairly caught, and had no choice but obey. He did so with that promptness which he always demanded from members of the criminal profession when he held them at a similar disadvantage.

CHAPTER XVI.

"HE MET HIS WATERLOO."

By what means the four criminals discovered the presence of the detective in the hall outside was never ascertained. Probably he made some slight noise that betrayed him, for, as we have shown, the descent upon the startled officer was so overwhelming, surrounded, as it may be said he was, that he had no choice but to submit as a prisoner.

Detective Fagan knew how to bow gracefully to the inevitable. He remained with his hands reaching toward the stars, until Paff Higgens (the others holding their weapons ready) stepped forward and disarmed him.

"I suppose I can drop my hands now?" was the inquiring remark of the prisoner.

"Not yet; wait till I'm through."

Having satisfied himself that the captive had no more weapons about him, the captor told him to lower his hands and pass into the room, where a couple of candles were burning on the broad mantelpiece.

Fagan walked to the middle of the apartment, turned about, and, with a smile, lifted his hat, bowed and said:

"I bid you good-evening, Paff and Hake and Bike and Volney; how are you all? I hope I see you well."

"Pixley Fagan!" was the exclamation of Paff Higgens, the first to recognize the famous detective. "What are you doing here?"

"Awaiting your pleasure, gentlemen," was the imperturbable reply.

But this facetiousness was wasted on these men. They were filled with wrath that the interloper should have followed them to their chosen retreat. Each man held his weapon in hand, and the scowling, threatening looks they cast upon the prisoner boded ill to him.

"We don't want any fooling from you. If you know what is best you will answer our questions truthfully."

"I cannot answer them before they are asked."

"What brought you to this out-of-the-way place?"

"I saw my friend Volney Biggs strolling in this direction, and having nothing special on hand, thought it would be interesting to follow him. I did so; came in the front hall, and employed myself in listening to your entertaining conversation."

"How much did you hear?" demanded Higgens.

Had Fagan attempted to deceive these men by pretending he had just come and had not caught enough words to give him any knowledge of their scheme, every one of the four would have known he was speaking an un-

truth. It could not have helped him, and was likely to work him injury.

"I have not been here long, but long enough to hear, as I judge, about all that was worth hearing. I understand you have things fixed to crack the vault of the Berwyck Bank to-night, and that you intend to stay in this old house until the hue and cry is over."

There the whole thing was in a nutshell. What more could they ask?

"How is it you happen to be in Berwyck at the same time with us?"

This was an important question, and, as will be observed, the detective's reply was straightforward, even though misleading.

"I was sent for to look into another matter."

"What was it?"

"That I cannot tell you, for it would be unprofessional. I pledge you my word, however, that it has not the remotest connection with any one of you. You can well understand that, when I say I have been in Berwyck the better part of two days, and had no suspicion when I came that any one of you had ever been in the town. Indeed, it is less than two hours since I accidentally laid eyes on Volney Biggs."

The criminals were inclined to believe this statement.

"Well," said Higgens, "we've got you here, and that bank is to be cracked to-night. What do you suppose we are going to do with you?"

Detective Fagan shrugged his shoulders.

"I would be pleased if I could answer that question, but I shall have to wait until I hear from *you*."

"There's only one thing to do," interposed Volney Biggs, who in some respects was the worst of the party.

A suggestive movement of his pistol left no doubt of his fearful meaning. A word from the leader would have caused Biggs to carry out his own wishes, and he would have done it, too, with pleasure.

But here was the problem: To release the prisoner would destroy the scheme they had elaborated with so much care and place every one of the four in peril, for

the detective would be certain to turn his liberty to the best account without delay.

Now there was not one of those four who was not ready to shoot his man in the way of self-defense, or when it became necessary to insure the success of an enterprise. Their previous history had proven that.

There was only one of them, however, who was prepared to kill a detective when it was not absolutely necessary. That one was Volney Biggs. He had followed his dark career sufficiently long to look upon all officers of the law as his mortal enemies. He especially detested Pixley Fagan, who had carried for months a warrant for his arrest, and was suspected of holding similar papers relating to one or more other members of the party.

The question presented itself as to what was to be done with the officer to prevent his interfering with their plans.

Fagan would have given his parole and respected it, but the ruffians were too suspicious to take any chances like that.

" 'Dead men tell no tales,' " added Volney Biggs. "If you fellows are afraid to undertake the job I'll do it myself."

"Let me have my pistol," said Detective Fagan, "and I'll be pleased to stand up in front of that coward."

But Biggs had no intention of settling the question in that fashion.

While Paff Higgens was as merciless as Biggs, he looked ahead. The taking off of so widely known an officer as Pixley Fagan would be certain to be discovered sooner or later, followed by a strong probability that the crime would be brought home to them.

That was liable to produce unpleasant consequences.

While the discussion was going on Higgens took a candle from the mantel, and said to Hoover:

"Come with me."

He led the way down the stone steps to the cellar, whose door was at the side of the room. Pausing at the bottom, Higgens held the light above his head and looked around.

It was a spacious apartment, and, like most of the old-fashioned ones, wholly below ground. The two small windows, which allowed light to enter during the day, opened into little excavations dug on the outside, and neither window was large enough to allow any animal larger than a cat to crawl through.

All the walls were a foot in thickness. The only possible egress was through the door at the head of the steps by which they had descended into the cellar.

"What do you think of it?" asked Higgens of his companion.

"It will do; it couldn't be more secure, but what about the door up the steps?"

"Some one will have to stand guard there."

"Who shall it be?"

"Biggs."

"But he'll shoot the prisoner."

"What of it? *We'll* be away when it's done."

"I understand," replied Hoover, with a nod of his head.

"Enough said; let's go up."

Paff Higgens led the way to the upper room, where the rest listened to his decision.

He made his announcement in a few words.

"It won't do to let this young man loose till we finish our business. The cellar looks pretty strong. Mr. Fagan will oblige me by going down the steps and staying there for a few days. Inasmuch as he may get into mischief if left to himself, Volney will stay in the building to guard him. Volney, you are free to follow your own judgment how best to do that. When Mr. Fagan goes out among his friends again he isn't likely to boast about this affair."

No, indeed; could the detective ever recall the episode without mortification? Never was an officer more perfectly checkmated.

"I bid you good-evening, gentlemen, and may your scheme of to-night be confounded."

Detective Fagan, hat in hand, bowed to the party, walked to the head of the stairs and coolly descended

into the darkness below. His frightful imprisonment had begun.

Volney Biggs was disposed at first to protest against the arrangement of their leader, for it eliminated him from all active participation in the unlawful business where his distinct part had been assigned.

But the scheme, after all, commended itself to him in more than one respect. In the first place, he was the most cowardly member of the company. He saw that if any miscarriage resulted his situation would be far better than theirs. His confederates were bound to protect each other to the last extremity, and, if worst came to worst, he could prove an alibi at the time of the burglary.

Then he was to have charge of his most execrated enemy; that triumph was worth much. So he assented to the scheme.

The understanding was that the three men should leave the old stone house about eleven o'clock, making their way to the bank each by a different route. Bike Warner was to take the lead, signaling to them as near the hour of midnight as he could, if the coast was clear.

The reader has learned how this arrangement was carried into effect, supplemented by the complete overthrow of the whole plan.

The intention of the three active participants was to return to the stone house in the early hours of the morning, there to remain in hiding during the hue and cry. Then, when the opening became favorable, they would steal away, one by one, in the darkness to meet again in the heart of the great metropolis.

Thus it came about that Volney Biggs found himself the only member of the party in the building, before the coming of the turn of night. He sat in the upper room, where he had been left by his companions with the candles burning and with his prisoner below stairs.

He had given his own weapon to Hake Hoover, and retained the handsome revolver taken from Detective Fagan.

The door leading to the cellar, like all the rest, was

much more massive and strong than is generally the case in houses of more modern make. It opened inward, and was secured by means of a powerful iron bolt. Its position, protecting it from the weather, caused it to be much better preserved than the other doors.

The situation of the prisoner could hardly have been more secure. The single door by which he could escape was the one just mentioned. Since that opened into the cellar, it could be moved only by drawing it toward him. Every one knows how slight is the force he might exert in that direction as compared with a pushing movement, into which he could throw his whole strength, greatly increased by hurling his body against the obstruction.

Even that recourse was made useless by the position of the door at the head of the steps, which precluded any gathering of momentum, or what may be considered as leverage.

On the other hand, Volney Biggs was at vast advantage. He had a loaded firearm at command. The prisoner was unarmed. At the best he could not force the door until after determined and persistent effort. He would hardly venture upon that, knowing as he must that in case of success he would be confronted by the weapon of his mortal enemy.

It cannot be known what sinister designs assumed form in the treacherous depths of the miscreant's heart. Probably he contemplated an excuse for shooting the helpless officer, but was deterred by the fear of consequences.

The body of Fagan might not be found for weeks, but one fact could be brought home to Volney Biggs: he had visited the house a short time before the disappearance of the officer, and represented to Watchman Otter that he was considering the purchase of the structure.

Trifling as was this incident, it would be made to connect him with the crime, and he shuddered to think what the ultimate end of the other detectives' work would assuredly be.

No; much as he might wish to put Fagan out of the way, he was afraid to do it. He would leave him in his underground prison without food or water, there to per-

ish for aught his jailer cared; but that was the furthest extent to which Biggs dared go in that direction.

For a full half-hour the ruffian turned over in his mind a scheme of making a bargain with his prisoner, by which the latter should pledge himself to drop all proceedings against him.

The trouble about this, however, was that Biggs was estopped from offering anything like adequate consideration, since he dare not release Fagan, who would accept no other terms, if indeed he would accept those.

Biggs shrank from the attempt to take the papers from his man. Although larger physically than the officer, he knew Fagan was a terrible antagonist, who more than likely would get the better of him.

But the decisive point against the whole thing was that any papers obtained forcibly could not be of the slightest possible benefit to Biggs.

Furthermore, it was likely that all documents which concerned the criminal were at the hotel where Fagan had been stopping.

It was natural that Biggs should fall to wondering how his prisoner was passing his time in the gloom below stairs. He could hear nothing, though he stood by the door several times listening for sounds from below. The tomb could not have been more profoundly still.

He returned to his seat, lighted a cigar, and, looking up at the single tallow candle that was left on the mantel, awaited the slow passage of time.

He calculated that his friends would be engaged for a considerable while at the bank. At the end of three hours, therefore, one or more of them ought to be back at the stone building.

It was now one o'clock, as a glance at his watch showed, and the minutes moved with leaden feet.

He assumed the easiest posture he could in the unfurnished room, and, despite the many stirring thoughts which filled his mind, dropped asleep.

When he awoke the morning light was shining through the broken windows. The night had passed.

As soon as he recalled his wandering senses he sprang up and dashed to the door at the head of the cellar stairs.

A second's examination proved it had not been opened and showed no signs of disturbance. The iron bolt was in place, and Hercules himself could not have forced it from the other side.

Biggs listened, but all was silent below. Nevertheless, he knew his man was there, for he had not passed through the only avenue of escape that it was possible to use.

But what meant the absence of Higgens, Hoover and Warner? They ought to have returned hours ago.

Could anything have gone amiss?

Volney Biggs grew faint at the thought, but no other explanation presented itself.

His anxiety intensified into torture. He peeped out of the windows, but saw only a farmer driving along the highway.

He could stand it no longer. He must find out what it all meant.

But the prisoner below stairs—what would become of *him?*

Biggs knew of the two windows which let in a few streakings of daylight. They were too small to help Fagan. No; the door must be used, and that alone.

The criminal now examined the fastenings once more. There was no way of making them more secure. In fact, they were as strong as the entrance to the penitentiary from which he had so much trouble in escaping several years before.

"He won't dare approach the door as long as he thinks I am on the watch," was the belief of Biggs, "so I will let him continue to believe I am at my post."

This was easily done. He slipped out of the rear of the house on tiptoe, and then reached the highway by a roundabout course which precluded all possibility of the detective seeing him had he attempted to use the small windows.

Pulling himself together, Biggs walked as briskly as was prudent toward Berwyck, with eyes and ears alert.

He did not have to go far before his worst fears were confirmed. The whole town knew of and were talking about the attempted burglary of the bank. All three of the men concerned had been captured, and were at that moment securely locked in the county jail.

"Heavens!" muttered the startled Biggs, "suppose I had been with the boys last night! They would have gathered me in, sure. I think the best thing for me to do is to run."

But, instead of yielding to this natural impulse, he mustered enough courage to stand his ground. Still further, he began stirring himself in behalf of his unfortunate comrades. He visited them in jail, under the pretense of being a lawyer, engaged the services of Mr. Murphy in the hopeless case, and left no stone unturned that promised the slightest hope.

Volney Biggs was shrewd enough to discover one important fact. Pixley Fagan was not the only detective concerned in baffling the burglars. Some one besides him, and possessing greater skill than he, had taken a hand.

Who this man was Biggs did not know, though he meant to learn in the course of the day. Well aware that he himself would be an object of interest, if not suspicion, he resorted to the common artifice of leaving town, only to return stealthily later in the evening.

It was he who, prowling in the neighborhood of President Dillingham's home, was attracted by the movements of Dixon, the bookkeeper, and held his house for a short time under surveillance, with no well-defined idea of what he hoped to accomplish by that course.

Biggs's absence from town for the afternoon prevented his ascertaining the identity of the detective that had entrapped the burglars so cleverly, but he was certain of learning before the passing of the next day.

As the reader has learned, he found it out before the passing of that night.

Biggs went back to the hotel and repeated his visit to the room belonging to Pixley Fagan. While he was engaged in examining the luggage of the missing detective he met his Waterloo.

CHAPTER XVII.

"SO YOU ARE HERE?"

MEANWHILE, how was Detective Fagan getting along?

There was no use in lamenting his foolhardiness, or regretting the step that had brought this peril upon him. He was caught in the worst predicament of his life, and the question that confronted him was what could he do to help himself?

He paused at the bottom of the stairs and stood motionless until he heard the bolt slid into place. Then he listened to the murmur of voices, but could not distinguish the words. It mattered not, for he felt no further interest in what was said.

Drawing a match from the little safe in his pocket, he struck it and began an exploration of his prison.

Several matches sufficed to give him as much knowledge as if the whole interior were brightly illuminated. He was surrounded by four thick stone walls, so compactly cemented that the cellar was as if hewn out of the solid rock.

The floor was of earth, quite hard, but susceptible to his pocket-knife. To tunnel under the walls and to the surface outside, however, would require days, and possibly weeks, of unremitting work. He would perish with thirst or starvation meanwhile, for it was not to be supposed that his captors meant to furnish him with water and food.

So any essay in that direction was not to be entertained.

The smallness of the two windows rendered them equally unavailable. It struck him as strange that the cellar contained no second or outer entrance, but such was the case. Everything that had ever entered or been carried out of it was by means of the door he himself had used.

Wishing to economize his supply of matches, which numbered hardly a dozen, he devoted a half-hour to fingering the walls in different places, in the hope of

finding some loose stones that might be further displaced. Nothing of the kind presented itself.

He half suspected that when Volney Biggs was left alone upstairs he would carry out his threat against him. The detective, therefore, fought shy of the foot of the steps, and held himself ready to retreat if the man appeared.

He meant to compel Biggs to enter the cellar to complete his work, and in that event there was no saying what might occur.

But, as the reader knows, nothing of the kind took place.

Pixley Fagan was too active of mind and body to remain idle; all he was waiting for was to discover the best means of helping himself.

The subterranean prison contained absolutely nothing at all, not so much even as a billet of wood.

The crossbeams were on a level with his head, so that he was compelled to stoop slightly in moving about. By straightening up he could easily press the palms of his hands against the heavy boards which formed the floor, supported on the beams.

This fact decided his course of procedure.

Several more of the precious matches were used to help him scrutinize the roof of the cellar.

It may be said of the men who put together this old structure that they builded better than they knew. Here were the floors and many portions as strong as on the day the edifice was completed. The same will probably be said a half-century from to-day.

Pixley Fagan determined to cut his way through the floor overhead to one of the rooms above. If he could do that and climb out of the cellar, he was ready to take his chance of escaping.

It need not be said that he selected the corner furthest removed from where the men were holding their council. The cellar did not extend under the kitchen portion, but reached to the furthest extremity of the front of the building. It was there the prisoner decided to begin his work.

The task was a most formidable one, for the only instrument at his command was his pocket-knife, whose sharp blades were so delicate that the utmost care was necessary to prevent their breakage while working in the dark.

If it should prove that the boards composing the floor were dovetailed into each other, the difficulty of his task would be increased almost immeasurably.

But minutes were valuable, and Pixley Fagan had none to throw away.

He had fixed the point of beginning so clearly in his mind that it was continually before him, though working in utter darkness.

Using his left hand as a help to guide him, he began cutting in the wood at right angles to the grain. It was easy to decide how large a space was needed to permit the passage of his body, and he set to work to open such a passage.

It was fearfully slow work. The wood was oak, and it had been seasoned by a century of use. It would take hours to cut through any portion of it, but it was far better to keep busy than to sit down and fold his hands in despair.

Fagan knew he was making progress, though it was exasperatingly slow. The unusual position of his arm, all the while extended above his head, and the continuous pressure and movement of the fingers, after a time brought so great fatigue to arm and hand that he was obliged to rest.

In a few minutes, however, he was at it again, and thus the work went on through the long, lonely hours of the night.

No one not similarly placed can understand the tediousness and trying nature of the task. After a time Fagan's right shoulder began aching, and caused such intense pain that he shifted the knife to his left hand, in the hope of obtaining relief without losing time.

But the man was not ambidextrous, and to his dismay the first effort snapped the knifeblade in two.

"Heavens!" he muttered, "that ruins everything."

He stood for a minute bathed in cold perspiration, though the cellar was chilly at that hour. But the despair in his heart quickly vanished, when he recalled that his knife contained two other blades, though one of them was the small file meant for the finger-nails, but which is generally more ornamental than useful.

Furthermore, of the broken blade one half remained. The abrupt angle made by the fracture caused this to be tenfold more effective. Forgetting his aching shoulder, he applied the piece of steel with such vigor that he accomplished more in the next half-hour than in double that time before the accident.

"It would have paid me to begin by breaking all the knifeblades," was his thought, though he did not adopt the method with either of the remaining portions.

The hour came, however, when he had to stop operations for a longer time than usual. He sat down on the damp floor, with his back against the wall, so tired that, after the aching in his shoulder passed off, he imitated the man overhead—sank into sleep.

He opened his eyes after Volney Biggs had departed. The cellar was filled with a faint light, caused by the sun's rays entering the small windows.

Fagan started up at the thought that if Biggs had known of his unconsciousness he could have descended the steps and carried out his fell purpose against him.

However, nothing of the sort had been done, and it was useless to think of it.

As the detective climbed to his feet and stretched his limbs he became aware of two uncomfortable facts: he was exceedingly thirsty and hungry. Inasmuch as nothing in the way of food or drink had been offered him, it was evident he was to be left to perish by one of the most miserable and lingering of deaths.

But such a taking off could not come for several days, no matter how intense the suffering.

Meanwhile, he must work, work, work.

And work he did, plying the knife till the wrists gave out, the shoulder was wrenched with pain and the eyes ached from their constant tension.

When the growing dimness of the light in the cellar, and a glance at his watch, told him that the day was drawing to a close and a second night was closing in, the task was not finished, though much progress had been made.

The prisoner had cut a deep gutter on the four sides of a square a foot and a half in diameter. Around this hollow the knife had traveled again and again, eating a little further on each circuit, until he began to hope he had wellnigh penetrated the thickness of the boards in several places.

He ceased cutting at one end, giving all his efforts to the other three sides. When they gave way it would be easy to snap off the remaining portion.

But night descended, and he was still at it. Every possible incentive urged him on. He knew the crisis at the bank had come and gone long before. Kneeland Ely must be puzzled and alarmed over his absence, but could never dream of its explanation, and was powerless to help him.

He was ahungered and athirst, but the only means of obtaining relief was by cutting his way out of his prison. He must keep at it or quit and die.

Many a time he thought of attacking the door, but that was as near impregnable as the floor before he began cutting. Besides, he suspected Volney Biggs was waiting for such a pretext for firing upon him.

No, he had struck the one and only course.

Finally, the wearied officer closed his knife and replaced it in his pocket. Then he put both hands against the square space inclosed by the deep furrow made by his knifeblade, steadied himself and pushed upward with his utmost strength.

The whole piece yielded as though it were an eggshell. A similar effort two hours before would have accomplished the same thing.

With a thrill of hope, the detective grasped the edges of the opening with both hands and drew himself through.

Had he been sure of landing right among the four burglars he would hardly have hesitated. His prison had

become so hateful that he felt he would lose his mind if he stayed longer in it.

The occasion warranted the use of one of the two remaining matches. His listening ear caught no evidence that his jailer had heard or suspected what was done, so he did not fear to draw the match along the hard floor and look about him.

He had entered the large room which years before served as the parlor of the old stone house. Neither on the mildewed walls nor on the hard floor was there the first sign of picture or furniture. For generations it had been deserted and bereft of everything except the wide, gaping fireplace and the traces of what once had been.

Fagan moved quickly and softly across the floor to the door that led into the hall where he was playing the eavesdropper at the time of his capture. It opened readily, as did the outer door.

Within three minutes after he climbed through the opening in the roof of the cellar he was in the fresh, glorious air on the outside.

Happy, thankful, hopeful—but, oh, so thirsty and hungry!

His first step was to hasten down the road, and then, when satisfied no one was observing him, he hurried to the clear little stream winding through the hollow, knelt down and quaffed his fill.

"I wonder whether there are enough provisions in Berwyck to give me the supper I want?" was his next thought as he strode rapidly toward the town.

He was confident that disaster had overtaken the criminals, since, from what he knew of the preparations made, he could not well see how it could result otherwise.

Besides, the profound stillness within the stone house he had just left was proof that the party had not carried out their scheme of rendezvousing there afterward. There could be but the one explanation of this failure.

Like Volney Biggs, who preceded him over the road, Pixley Fagan had not far to go before learning the truth. The attempt against the bank had not only failed but

three of the burglars were securely lodged behind lock and key.

That much learned, the great load was lifted from Detective Fagan's mind. He therefore went straight to the hotel, and, though the hour was late, ordered a meal befitting a man's physical condition who had not tasted food for more than twenty-four hours.

And while Kneeland Ely and Volney Biggs were holding their interesting chat upstairs the gentleman into whose apartment they had intruded was coming up the steps in a very comfortable frame of mind.

"Helloa!" he said to himself, when he caught the glimmer of light beneath the door, "some one has made a mistake."

In accordance with his habits of caution, he stepped softly, pausing in the hall outside and listening.

"Helloa! that's Ely's voice, I'm sure; whom is he talking with?"

A minute's listening answered the question.

"Volney Biggs, as sure as I'm alive! He's deserted his post and come down to my room. I wonder if they're discussing the tariff question."

The position of Fagan enabled him to catch every word, even though the speakers were talking in unusually low tones.

At the crisis of the conversation Fagan pushed open the door, with the exclamation:

"There is no need of that; here he is!"

Nothing could have shown the training of the two friends more strikingly than their course at this crisis.

Kneeland Ely did not look around at the man whose voice he recognized. He did not forget that the ruffian in front of him was on the alert to seize any advantage the instant it presented itself.

In the most matter-of-fact manner Ely said:

"Pix, take his revolver out of his pocket."

"It will afford me great pleasure to do so— Helloa! by George! it's my own little beauty," he exclaimed, deftly removing and holding aloft the pistol before Volney Biggs could have prevented had he dared to do so.

"So you are here?" remarked the scamp with a smile, looking in the face of his former prisoner; "we were just going after you."

"That doesn't seem necessary now," observed Kneeland Ely; "but I gathered from what you said, Mr. Biggs, that my friend Pix had been wounded; I do not observe that anything is the matter with him."

"That was only a little joke of mine; I wouldn't have hurt the dear fellow for the world. I meant to excite your fears, and then make you happy by showing how well we treated your friend."

"If *he* had had his way," said Fagan, "he would have used his pistol on me long ago; but, Len, what are you going to do with this gentleman? I don't want him in my room for the whole night."

"We'll deliver him to the authorities, and let him join his friends in the county jail. Then Lawyer Murphy will have enough to occupy his gigantic talents."

Under the guard and custody of Ely and Fagan, Volney Biggs was speedily lodged in as secure confinement as were those of his confederates that had preceded him to imprisonment.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"ENOUGH! YOU HAVE PROVEN IT."

KNEELAND ELY and Pixley Fagan had too much to discuss, after delivering their prisoner to the authorities, to think of retiring for a long time.

In the first place, Fagan gave a minute account of all that had befallen him after his "dropping out' of matters on the preceding evening.

Kneeland listened without a question, but indulged in a smile at some of the grotesque features of his friend's experience.

He uttered no word of reproach. It was not his habit to do that, for he felt that none is exempt from criticism himself.

It took Ely a shorter time to relate all that could in-

terest his friend respecting the four men that had been lodged in jail.

"Now, as the case stands," added Ely, "we are back again precisely where we started several days ago."

"In what respect?"

"Reflect. This episode of the burglars—that is, Higgens, Hoover & Co.—is only a parenthesis in the flow of incidents; it is a side issue—nothing to do with the main purpose."

Fagan nodded his head.

"You were sent for a few days since by President Dillingham to try to clear up the mystery of the missing hundred thousand dollars. You and I both came. Just as matters were assuming shape four of our old acquaintances took it into their heads to rob the bank that had just suffered a big loss. 'Twas the oddest coincidence I ever knew, and but for the preceding burglary the quartette would have cleaned out about everything."

"And not one of the four understands as yet how we happened to be in Berwyck at the time of their visit."

"And probably never will; they will all be somewhat older and wiser men than they are to-night when they get out again. But business is business—"

"Which reminds me," interrupted Fagan; "I wonder whether that fellow took away any of my documents?"

He made a hasty examination of his valise and the drawers of the bureau, but so far as he could ascertain nothing was missing.

"He didn't find what he was looking for," suggested Ely.

"It doesn't look as if he did, though I don't see how anything of mine in the way of papers can help him. But I interrupted you."

"You remember the papers which you brought from the house of President Dillingham, Pix?"

"Yes; I left them with you."

"I have them," said Ely, drawing the package from an inner pocket and spreading it out on the stand under the gaslight.

"They contain a good specimen of the handwriting of Dixon, the bookkeeper of the Berwyck Bank."

"And also a letter of Mr. Dillingham, and the missive that was shoved under the door of the bank when you and I were sitting in the directors' room. We will make another comparison of them."

"Shall I try it first?"

"If you please; let me know your conclusion."

"That has been already reached."

"Possibly you may revise it," was the quiet remark of Fagan, who leaned back in his chair.

Pixley Fagan spent several minutes in careful study of the several papers, but he did it only to oblige his friend.

"What is your second decision?" asked Kneeland Ely.

"Confirmatory of the first."

"And that is what?"

"I pride myself upon being somewhat of an expert in reading chirography."

"Did you ever know of three experts reaching the same conclusion?"

"I don't understand what you are hinting at," remarked Fagan, taking up the papers again and glancing at them.

"You have not fully answered my question as to what your conclusion is."

"I never knew a person who could successfully disguise his handwriting for any length of time. He may work out a few words or sentences that will mislead you, but when it comes to a page of note or foolscap, he is sure to betray himself. That person who shoved the letter under the door took every pains to conceal his handiwork, but half-way down the page he drops into some mannerisms that betray him. My conclusion is that the same hand that wrote the purposely misspelled words is the same that wrote *this*."

"You feel no doubt on that point?"

"Not the slightest."

"All the same, Pix, *you are wrong*."

"Impossible! you can never make me believe that."

"I shall do so in a few minutes. Study that script in your hand more closely, and you will find that the writer

not only attempted to disguise his handwriting but strove still harder to *make it resemble the writing of some one else.*"

"What in the name of the seven wonders was his object?"

"He knew the note would pass under the critical eye of experts like you and me, and he meant to divert suspicion to an innocent party."

"You must be mistaken, Len," exclaimed Fagan, who, without noticing it, dropped into the habit of addressing his friend by the name to which he was more accustomed than that of Kneeland Ely.

"Let us see," said the latter, drawing his chair closer to the table.

Then he proceeded to point out what might be called microscopic evidences of his remarkable declaration. There were plenty of them, and few indeed would have detected what to Ely was as plain as day.

But if there ever was a marvelous expert at that sort of business Kneeland Ely was the man. The skill of Pixley Fagan was as that of a child compared with it.

He was still engaged at his task when Fagan interrupted.

"Enough! you have proven it! I own up; but, heavens! what is the conclusion?"

"I need not name it. If I am right, and you know that I am, only *one* conclusion is possible. '

Neither spoke; but they understood each other.

"Len," said the other, almost in a whisper, "there's another party whom we ought to see."

"Who is he?"

"Old Otter, the watchman that was discharged and then taken back again. He must have an interesting story to tell, if it can be drawn from him."

"He has the story, and has told it."

"To whom?"

"To me."

"And what is it?"

"That, on the night the one hundred thousand was taken from the vault of the Berwyck Bank, and previous

to the visit of the thief, Otter was drugged, though he never suspected it."

"How could that be?"

Kneeland Ely told of his visit to the old watchman, and what he revealed of the medicine given to him for his rheumatism.

"When I held the empty phial to my nose I caught the odor of laudanum. Perhaps he saw a dim glimmering of the truth in my words and manner, but he is too slow of intellect to comprehend the shameful trick that was played on him."

"And he gave you the name of the party?"

"He had been cautioned not to do so, and had pledged himself he would not. No bribe or threat could induce him to break his word, but, Pix, it wasn't necessary; I am glad he didn't utter the name."

"So am I," was the comment of Fagan. "What is the next step?"

"For each of us to go to bed. It's past two o'clock; no need of rising early. Good-night."

Kneeland Ely darted out of the door and into his own room, where a few minutes later he was sunk in a profound slumber.

Pixley Fagan lay awake a long time, disturbed by torturing meditations over what had taken place within the preceding two or three days, supplemented by the astounding knowledge that had come to him that evening through his friend in the adjoining room. But at last he, too, became unconscious and did not wake until late the following morning.

"Pix," said Ely, in his sharp, business way, when they met again after their first meal in the room of Fagan, "your absence from the rounding up of the party a couple of nights ago must have caused some wonderment on the part of President Dillingham. I haven't had time to explain matters to him, and if I had had the time I was at a loss how to do it. Drop around there and make your report."

"What shall I say?"

"I see no objection to your telling the truth. You

may not feel very proud while doing so, but you can gloss over your session in the cellar of Watchman Otter's old house and make it appear that you overcame your four enemies single-handed."

"I suspect he would hold doubts on that score, but I will make the call you suggest."

"If I am not here, don't feel slighted. Before I decide on what is to be done to-day I must gather some knowledge. Off with you now."

But upon reaching the home of President Dillingham Detective Fagan was told he was absent, though expected back at any moment.

It was his niece, Miss Crosslands, who made this explanation, and invited the caller inside so cordially that Fagan accepted and found himself seated alone with the winsome young woman.

With some hesitation she said:

"You will pardon me, Mr. Fagan, but my uncle, who has few secrets from me, has made known your errand in Berwyck. That being the case, and feeling an interest as deep as he in your success, may I ask how are you progressing with your search for the parties who stole the large amount of money some nights ago?"

The visitor was taken somewhat aback by this direct question, but he noted the distressful expression of her countenance and answered, as may be said, in a non-committal way:

"Such work, you know, Miss Crosslands, is very difficult, and fails more often than it succeeds."

"I suppose," she remarked, "that it is wrong to feel pity for those who commit such crimes, but it always saddens me when I hear anything of them. There may be so many palliating circumstances of which we can know nothing; a starving family, misfortune or some sudden, overwhelming temptation, repented of as soon as yielded to, but not soon enough to save the erring one—these and others make the crime one which can be rightly judged only by Him who is never wrong in His judgment."

"True, and human judgment, being fallible, must not

be condemned too harshly. It is more often right than wrong, and, such as it is, it is the only thing that can make property and life safe."

"Do you think it right," asked the young lady, the flush on her face deepening, "to allow the guilty parties in a case of this kind to escape prosecution?"

"I am not sure I understand you."

"I am not sure that I understand myself; but what I wish to ask is, whether you can conceive of a set of circumstances in which you, as an officer of the law, would recommend that a wrongdoer should not be punished for what he has done?"

"Yes, I can conceive of such circumstances. Suppose, for instance, the men who took this one hundred thousand dollars from the Berwyck Bank should voluntarily give it up; why, having made all the restitution in their power, there is morally no crime, though technically they have violated the law."

"Suppose they should offer to surrender a *portion?*"

Detective Fagan shook his head.

"You must see, Miss Crosslands, that in such a case there is a double crime, and the demoralizing sin of compounding a felony, as it is called, is committed."

"Is such a course never justifiable?"

"It is hard to conceive of circumstances where it would be."

"But cannot some good be accomplished?"

"Possibly it might, so far as a single individual is concerned; but evil is encouraged. Those who consent thus to compromise with wickedness are incited by the basest motives, for they not only profit themselves but help to protect the wrongdoers. No, the severest punishment should be visited upon those who dally with right."

The heart of the detective ached when uttering these sentiments, for he saw the distress they caused the young lady before him.

She was a high-spirited and conscientious young woman, but, with her sex, when the heart is involved the judgment becomes untrustworthy.

There was something in the situation which cut closer

to her feelings than anything that had yet come to her in her young life.

She looked up abruptly with the question:

"Do you think you will succeed in discovering the persons guilty of this wrong?"

"You must understand that it is impossible to answer that question, except by saying that *I hope* to do so. Your uncle has urged me to spare no effort or expense in the effort."

She made no comment on this, and he rose to his feet. His wishes had undergone a change during the brief interview; he no longer desired to meet President Dillingham, and, fearful that if he remained longer he would do so, he bade the young lady good-day and withdrew.

CHAPTER XIX.

"THE MAN BY THE ROCK DISCOVERED HIM."

At the same time that Pixley Fagan was holding his conversation with Miss Crosslands his friend Kneeland Ely was walking toward the Berwyck Bank. It was past the hour of opening, and he was confident of finding the president there. He wished to see him. Having resumed the personal appearance he showed when first entering Berwyck, he was recognized as the trusted watchman chiefly concerned in capturing the criminals —who, it may be said, had become the hero of the town. It was hard for him to pretend he did not hear the complimentary remarks continually made about him as he walked the streets.

He saw groups on the opposite corners talking together, their admiring looks and gestures leaving no doubt that he was the subject of their remarks. He caught some of the observations of those whom he met face to face, and was obliged to acknowledge the salutations of grinning townspeople whom he never remembered to have seen, but who insisted upon claiming acquaintanceship.

It will be understood, therefore, that when he entered

the bank he was respectfully greeted, and no questions were asked when he strolled back to the directors' room.

Of course every one now understood what it meant when he took the situation of watchman of the bank. It was to secure a chance which could be best gained by that little subterfuge.

Kneeland Ely was the greatest detective in the city of New York. To him belonged the credit of outwitting and making prisoners of four desperate criminals, for the news had spread that he had lodged another, and the last, in jail.

Kneeland Ely, as we shall continue to call him for a brief while longer, encountered a slight disappointment. When he knocked and then pushed open the door of the directors' room the latter was empty.

He returned and spoke to Cashier McIlvaine.

"Do you know when Mr. Dillingham will be here?"

The cashier glanced at the clock on the wall.

"We expected him a few minutes ago; I have no idea what detains him."

"I will wait a little while."

"Go into the room and make yourself at home."

"Thanks; I will take the settee—that is, if Otter doesn't come in and claim it," added Ely with a smile, passing over and seating himself.

The visitor hoped that the president would not arrive for a little while. He had secured a good point of view and wanted to look around him for a few minutes, not forgetting also to use his ears.

Bookkeeper Dixon was busy at an adjoining desk. He cast a glance at the visitor and then bent to his work again.

That single turn of his face to view revealed a distressed countenance which told of an almost intolerable load he was bearing on his young shoulders.

Business was brisk for a time, and then came a lull such as is occasionally seen in similar institutions.

Dixon turned his head again, but this time it was toward the cashier, to whom he spoke in a voice so low that

but for the unusual quiet Ely would not have been able to overhear the words:

"George, I think I will have to lie off for the afternoon."

"You don't look well," was the sympathetic response of McIlvaine; "what's the trouble, the grip?"

"No, not that; but I have been out of sorts for a day or two. I hope a half-day's rest will put me in shape again."

"Why do you wait till noon? Go home now and get the benefit of the day."

"Your offer is tempting, but it will put too much on you; this bank, you know, isn't overburdened with help."

"I will manage very well without you."

"I'm obliged to you, George, but I'll stick to it till noon."

And, to signify the question was settled, the bookkeeper turned to his work again.

Kneeland Ely rose to his feet, and, with a half-military salute to the cashier, said:

"It is hardly worth while to wait for Mr. Dillingham; I can drop in later, when he will be here."

"I am sure he will be glad to see you," replied the cashier, returning the salutation.

A block away Ely saw President Dillingham walking toward the bank. Ely had only to cross the street to greet him, but he took care not to do so.

It looked as if, like Pixley Fagan, he had changed his mind about wishing to meet the head of the institution.

Between two and three o'clock on the afternoon of that day Frank Dixon, who had remained home under the plea of illness, came out of the door of the modest cottage with his natty coat closely buttoned and swinging a small cane in his hand. He walked slowly, as if with considerable suffering. He looked nervous and in need of the fresh spring air.

As he walked he glanced to the right and left, but seeing no one in whom he was interested, moved in the direction of President Dillingham's residence, moderating his gait still more as he came opposite, and looking up at

the same window which he had signaled some nights before.

The eyes, roving along the handsome front of the dwelling, were rewarded by a sight of Miss Crosslands, who was expecting him. She showed herself at one of the windows, smiled and waved him a salute. He lifted his hat in reply and passed on. She stood at her post, gazing fondly after him as long as he was in sight, but he did not again look behind him.

At the first corner young Dixon turned to the right and quickened his pace. The noticeable fact about his course was that he was now facing the open country and thus leaving the little town of Berwyck behind him. The further he went the more rapid became his gait. It did not take him long to place himself beyond the last house, when he struck out like a pedestrian in training. He swung his light cane jauntily about his head, occasionally whipping the branches of some overhanging tree at the side of the road or of a bush growing near his path. A colt was cropping the grass so close to the fence that Dixon reached over and gave him a smart blow on his haunch. The startled animal wheeled, let fly with both heels at the offender and galloped a hundred yards away in the pasture, when he stopped, faced about and snorted angrily at him, as if challenging him to climb the fence and have it out. Altogether, the bookkeeper of the Berwyck Bank acted like any person except an invalid.

A small rattle-trap of a wagon clattered along the road over the same course taken by the young man. The vehicle seemed in the last stages of dilapidation, and the single horse between the shafts made spasmodic attempts at a trot, urged thereto by the blows of his driver, the jerking of the reins and his vigorous language. Such bursts of speed were not continued long before the animal dropped abruptly again to a walk. This being slower than that of the pedestrian, caused the farmer to fall behind, while the occasional spurts lessened the space between them.

The driver's appearance was in keeping with his horse and wagon. His shaggy hair fell about his shoulders

from under his ragged hat, his clothes were old and of the fashion of years before. He sat on the right side of the single seat, continually yanking the lines with his left hand, while the right was as busily employed with the whip, which produced little effect upon the bony horse.

For a half-mile the highway led through an attractive region, with thrifty farms on the right and left. It was just the sort of spring weather for work, and numbers of men and boys were in the fields. But, less than a mile away, Dixon made another turn in the course he was following. This took him into a less frequented road and led toward a long stretch of rocky woods which rose into hills of several hundred feet elevation beyond.

The ground being somewhat ascending, and the distance to this point having been rapidly traversed, the young man showed signs of weariness. He slackened his pace from the moment of entering on his new course. It was then that he looked searchingly along the road in front and that over which he had just passed. If he was hunting for anything he did not find it, which fact, it is to be assumed, was not displeasing to him.

Meanwhile, the old farmer who was having such a laborious time with his nag turned into the less traveled road, though, as he expressed it, he was obliged almost to "saw his consarned head off." Dixon looked back with an amused expression, but gave him and his animal no further attention.

Probably at a distance of a quarter of a mile the road entered the long tract of woods alluded to, where there was no fence on either side and the ruts showed that days had passed since any team had been over the route. Dixon had slowed his pace again, and had not penetrated far among the trees when he turned for the last time, moving at right angles to the course of the highway.

On this occasion he did not follow any other road, but passed among the trees, as if guiding his steps by means of some faintly marked footpath. The farmer had forced his animal to a trot once more, and he went by the point where the footman had turned off with a fine display of

speed. The figure of the pedestrian was seen flickering among the trees, but they soon hid him from the sight of any one in the road. He did not look around at the wagon, but centered his attention on what was in front and which it was to be presumed he was approaching.

A little way ahead the road made a turn to the left. The farmer did not go far along this when he drew his animal to one side, so that he and the wagon would be out of the way of any one passing along the highway. The horse was forced a few yards among the trees, when, with surprising nimbleness, the driver leaped out and hastily tied the halter to the limb of a tree.

Any one studying the old man while thus engaged would have observed that his corduroy trousers were tucked in the tops of his heavy boots, while his slouchy coat descended to his knees, and was secured in front by a single button, all the rest being gone. The observant spectator would have noted another thing: that same frowsy farmer was well formed, and evidently was not only active of movement but exceptionally powerful.

The animal being secured against wandering off, the man ran his hand under his coat at his hip, as if to make sure that some weapon was in place. He then started diagonally in the direction taken by Dixon a short time before. This course, if continued, and provided the other followed a straight line, must bring them together ere long.

The forest, being clothed in its spring verdure, was quite dense, so that one passing through it could readily conceal himself. The ground, too, grew rougher and more broken. Rocks and bowlders appeared, causing short detours on the part of any one trying to follow a direct path.

But the farmer paid little heed to his own footsteps. He walked like one accustomed to that kind of exercise, and was on the lookout for the young man that had turned off in the woods before he checked his horse at the side of the highway.

This tousled-looking husbandman (whom the reader has truthfully suspected to be Kneeland Ely) had fol-

lowed his man all the way from Berwyck, and he did not intend to lose him now, when it was evident that the one in advance held no suspicion of the trick played on him.

"He can't be far off, and I'll nail him, but it would hardly do for him to see me; that would rouse his suspicion, and *that* means that the whole thing would become a flunk."

An Apache Indian could not have shown more skill in stealing among the trees than did Ely, in the guise of a verdant farmer of the neighborhood. He gradually worked over to the right, until at last he struck the faintly marked footpath for which he was searching.

"That young man can't be far off," he muttered, glancing down at the ground, "and I must be careful."

Despite the skill with which he moved, he narrowly missed a fatal blunder. The trail wound in and out among the trees in such a way that it was impossible to see more than a few paces in advance. He was moving forward in his guarded manner when he caught sight of his man a little way in advance. But for the fact that Dixon's face was turned in the same direction he must have discovered that figure prowling behind him.

The startled Ely dodged behind the nearest tree, large enough to shelter his body, and, removing his worthless hat, peered stealthily from behind the screen.

The young man had also made use of a similar shelter, though it was not so large as that of the watchman, and he, too, was peeping at something which apparently was not far in advance.

"While I'm watching him, he's got some other fellow under his eye."

There could be no doubt of this, but the density of the vegetation prevented Ely's discovering him. There must be a change of position before anything was accomplished.

This came about sooner than the watchman anticipated. Evidently Dixon was dissatisfied with his post, for he softly stepped from behind the tree and moved along the path, stepping as softly as if fearful that his footsteps would arouse some one in the vicinity.

Suddenly he looked around, as a person will do who

fears the very thing that was going on at that moment. Ely dared to hold his survey, for he knew that too little of his own face was exposed to be noticed. Dixon was scrutinizing the path, not the trees behind him.

The watchman noticed the excessive paleness of the young man. He was laboring under great mental agitation. His glance backward was brief, when he resumed his advance in the same guarded manner as before.

The winding path soon hid him from sight, and, at that moment, Ely emerged from behind his tree, stepped into the trail and followed after him. This peculiar course continued but for a few minutes, when the result was all that the watchman could wish.

The path led into a natural opening clear of trees, though rocks and bowlders were numerous. Dixon had again sheltered himself, and the man at the rear lost no time in doing the same.

The opening was less than half an acre in extent, and, standing near the center was a third person, well dressed, carrying also a cane and fully as old as Kneeland Ely.

The attitude of this individual was peculiar. His two hands were thrust into the pockets of his light overcoat, thus causing the end of his cane to project upward behind his shoulder. He wore a fine silk hat, and his attitude and manner were those of a person meditating a step which he hesitates to take.

He was erect, and kept glancing to the front, the right and left and behind him. Once he took several steps forward, then abruptly stopped and retreated again. This advance brought him close to the largest rock in sight. Something about that interested him.

Frank Dixon was so absorbed in watching this person that nothing was to be feared from his looking back over the trail along which he had made his way to the spot.

The shifting, vacillating action of the third party brought his countenance as distinctly into view as that of Dixon himself. Ely saw it, and it was so impressed upon his memory that it will remain with him through life.

The singular hesitation could not last long. The per-

son must decide either to do something or nothing. As if impatient with himself, he roused his energies, walked to the side of the rock, looked furtively around and was in the act of stooping when he abruptly stopped.

Frank Dixon, in his agitation, had betrayed himself. He stepped from behind the sheltering tree, and, as he did so, the man by the rock discovered him.

CHAPTER XX.

"IT IS GONE!"

RATHER singularly, Kneeland Ely came near committing the same blunder. Had he stood as near to the third man as did the younger he would have been seen at the same moment; but he was alert enough to whisk back behind his shelter in time to avoid detection.

"Now there will be a row!" was his conclusion; "I wouldn't want to be in that bookkeeper's shoes."

The elder, upon discovering the one that was watching him, started as if from the sting of a serpent. He assumed the upright position and stood several seconds staring at the young man. His face was aflame and a tempest raged in his breast. Then, with his cane upraised, he strode toward the offender.

The conduct of the latter, under the embarrassing circumstances, was not lacking in a certain dignity. Instead of fleeing or seeking to screen himself from recognition, he calmly walked forward and confronted the angry individual.

"You sneak!" thundered the latter, with his cane upraised, "what do you mean by dogging me?"

The tones were so loud that they could have been heard considerably further away than where the watchman stood. But the reply of Dixon was in such a gentle voice that the listener did not catch a word of what was said.

"You have no business to follow me," continued the irate third party. "I have a mind to break every bone in your body. What do you mean by such conduct?"

Again came that soft answer, which is said to turn away wrath, for the listening ear of the one at the rear caught nothing of it. Dixon was gesticulating earnestly.

"If I could only steal near enough to learn what is said, it would prove mighty interesting; but that is impossible. They would be sure to detect me, and then their combined wrath would descend upon *my* head."

For ten minutes the couple stood close together in the path, engaged in a low but excited conversation. By and by the observant watchman saw that Dixon was doing nearly all the talking. The other listened attentively, but answered by shaking his head, swinging his cane and shifting the weight of his body from one foot to the other, as a person is apt to do when under great mental excitement.

By and by they faced about and began slowly walking along the path toward the highway where the watchman had left his horse and wagon.

This brought them so near to the eavesdropper that he dared not peep out from his hiding-place. He counted himself lucky if they passed without discovering him, for the tree was hardly large enough to hide his body. His expectation was that they would continue their conversation while passing near, and in that case were sure to say something worth his while to hear; but, much to his disappointment, not a word was uttered by either, though their thoughts must have been busy.

Fifty feet or more away Dixon turned about abruptly, stepping back a single pace from the track, so as to yield it to the other. Standing thus face to face, they renewed their conversation. The hum of their voices was heard, but nothing in the way of words could be identified. It was trying to the watchman, who, had he been a little further front or back while the conversations were going on, would have readily caught a portion of what passed. It would be supposed, now that the couple were drawing away from the spot, that Ely would follow them, for the second halt was brief; but instead of doing so, he waited until they had disappeared behind a turn in the path, when he pushed toward the open space near him.

Meanwhile, the others followed the winding trail until they debouched into the highway. Had they gone a little further up this—only around the first bend, in fact—they would have come upon a sleepy horse and a rattle-trap of a wagon, with the halter tied to a limb—an altogether unnecessary precaution, since no possible danger existed of the animal making a move until driven to it.

The sight of this team doubtless would have caused some curiosity and started an investigation, but it was not noticed by either of the men, who walked along the road to the edge of the wood in silence, when once again, and for the last time, they halted.

For half an hour or more they faced each other and talked like men deciding a question of life and death. The beauteous spring day drew to a close, the sun went down behind the hills and the twilight of coming night gathered over forest and meadow, and still they talked and argued, grew angry and then became cool, then one was sullen and then again each became interested.

But, with the coming of night, the long-deferred decision was reached. Whatever the cause of dispute, it was settled between them, though apparently on the strange condition that Dixon should leave the other and return to Berwyck, his companion remaining behind—for that was what took place.

The young man emerged from the deeper gloom of the wood into the open country, and, swinging his cane in the same jaunty manner about his shoulder and head as he walked, struck into the rapid, elastic pace he had shown on leaving the town earlier that afternoon.

The person from whom he had parted remained at the side of the highway gazing after him. His attitude was that of profound reverie.

In the distance twinkled the lights of the town, and now and then a sound came across the intervening space, like a shout or call, or the crowing of some cock that had lost track of the hours.

Suddenly a wagon rattled over the road, coming from the back country. The man instinctively stepped aside to allow it to pass, but paid no further attention.

"Say, mister, is that your team back there? If it is, you'd better make a move, for the old horse has been standing there for hours, and it begins to look as if something's wrong."

The farmer who called to the other sat in an ordinary country wagon, and spoke in a voice loud enough to be heard a hundred yards away. The individual addressed looked up at him, but what was said made little or no impression on him. He did not answer, and the farmer drove on, wondering what strange business could be afoot so near his own home.

Night had now fully come, and the moon was shining. The person in the road unfolded his arms, heaved a deep sigh and turned into the woods. He was following the path over which he had already passed a couple of times. He could not do so at a quick pace, for the moonlight, faint of itself, did not penetrate the dense vegetation overhead, and the trail was so indistinctly marked that he could keep to it only by continual care and caution.

Several times he was forced to pause and strike a lucifer match, which he held over his head as he peered forward; but he must have been familiar with the course, for not once did he go far astray. The distance was not great, and ere long he arrived at the forest opening already described.

The moon was now of help, and he advanced straight across the natural clearing to the rock beside which he was standing at the moment he discovered Frank Dixon watching him.

There was only a momentary pause, when he completed that which he set out to do hours before. Stooping down, he ran his arm beneath the rock in quest of something.

The next moment he straightened up, pressed his hands to his temples and staggered like a drunken man.

"Heaven help me! it is gone!" he wailed, barely saving himself from falling. Then, wildly hoping that some mistake had been made, he sprang back to the rock.

"No, no; it cannot be! it cannot be! it was a mistake —yes, a mistake. Of what was I thinking?"

He was now furiously scrambling with his hand under the great stone, as though he would overturn the enormous weight in his fierce effort to find something.

"No, it *is* gone! it has been stolen! God save me! I am ruined! I am ruined!"

CHAPTER XXI.

"I'VE GOT IT!"

IT will be recalled that Kneeland Ely remained behind the sheltering trunk of the tree until the two men whose movements he was spying disappeared in the direction of the highway. Then, instead of following them, he took the opposite course and arrived at the natural clearing already referred to.

Night had not yet fully come, and he paused on the edge of the opening, carefully surveying the ground in front. He observed nothing of any one, though that did not wholly remove the vague misgiving that had come during the last few minutes.

"There can be no doubt that *something* is hidden under that rock, and he was about to bring it forth at the moment he made the discovery that another was watching him. That caused a change of purpose, and he made for the young man with the intention of giving him a caning.

"I can't understand why he didn't. Dixon must possess a persuasive tongue thus quickly to soothe his wrath. But the appearance of the other is so striking that he may have attracted the notice of some one else beside the bookkeeper and watchman— Well, I declare!"

It was at this juncture that the very peril Ely had in mind appeared. Two forms were observed moving on the other side of the opening, and it hardly needed a second glance to identify them as a couple of those pests of civilization known as tramps.

"They have seen the other and suspect the business that brought him here," was the conclusion of the watchman; "but they do not know where to look for the package. Had the visitor taken it from under the rock, they would have robbed him of it; but they expect him back, and then will have a chance to get it."

Convinced that he was right in his surmise, the question arose as to what he should do under the new conditions.

Should he also wait and warn the imperiled man? That would never do, for the ensuing complication would overturn all the plans he had formed; the whole scheme, in fact, would be spoiled.

Should he wait until the impatience of the tramps led them to begin the search, and then take the package, or whatever it might be, from them?

That would be equally absurd, for, though a powerful man himself, and skilled in the art of self-defense, the task of overcoming two such lusty miscreants could not be easy. Possibly it would go the other way, unless he appealed to his revolver. That was likely to bring about unpleasant consequences, to say nothing of the possibility that the vagrants possessed weapons of their own.

Manifestly there was but one thing to do. This required nerve, but the reader need not be reminded that Kneeland Ely was not lacking in that respect.

He emerged from the shadow of the wood and made his way at a timid pace toward the rock which was such an interesting object to three persons just at this time. He paused every few steps and glanced furtively about, as if afraid of being noticed. He showed no knowledge of the presence of the tramps, who, on catching sight of him, made haste to dodge down out of view.

But Kneeland Ely required no one to tell him that two pairs of bleared eyes were peering from behind the bowlders and eagerly watching his every movement. He could do nothing that would not be seen by them.

Every feature of the forest opening was fixed so clearly in his mind that it was impossible to make a mistake, even in the gathering twilight. He halted at the precise spot where he had seen the other man stand, when about to stoop for a purpose that was self-evident to the watcher. With a hurried glance around, Ely dropped upon his knees and pushed his hand under the rock. A large, clear space was there, so much so that his hand had considerable play; but only a few seconds of groping were

necessary, when it came in contact with *something* which caused a quick throbbing of his heart.

He recognized the touch of paper, and, with a suppressed exclamation, drew out an oblong package five or six inches thick, somewhat longer and not so wide.

Instead of being tied with cords, it was bound around repeatedly with strong elastic bands, which held whatever was within in the smallest possible compass.

It was hardly the time, in view of what he knew about the tramps, for him to make an examination, but he could not resist the temptation. He deftly shifted enough of the bands to allow him to pull away the heavy paper from one end, and to gain a glimpse of what was within.

He saw something which told him the story: it was the figure "1000." He raised the end and looked at several other of the oblong slips. The same thrilling sight greeted him, together with the other scrollwork and ornamentation which identified each as a thousand-dollar bill!

"I've got it!" gasped the finder; "here is the whole hundred thousand dollars that was stolen from the Berwyck Bank several nights ago!"

What man in the situation of Kneeland Ely would have retained control of himself? He had been trained in the hard school of experience, but for a minute or two he trembled like an aspen and was hardly able to stand.

Then the recollection of the two vagrants crouching among the rocks and bowlders brought his self-possession back, and his nerves became like wires of steel.

The package of money was a big one, but he could handle it without difficulty. Under his flimsy outer coat was another one, strong and well made. Opening the front of this, he shoved the bundle within and carefully buttoned the garment over it.

As he anticipated, he had hardly faced about, with the appearance of retracing his own steps, when the tramps rose from behind the bowlder where they had been hiding. A collision was inevitable, and Ely was prepared for it. He paused as if startled, and stood still as they approached.

"Howdy?" called the one who was a step or two in advance of the other. "Have you found anything, pard?"

"W-ha-t do—do you mean?" asked Ely, with well-assumed timidity; "have you lost anything?"

"I reckon I hev; I put a package of diamonds under that rock this morning. They was sent to me by the Duke de Sassy from England last week. I was sorry to see you come up, run your hand under the stone and draw 'em out. Didn't you know it's wery wrong to be so thoughtless about other people's property?"

"I haven't got any diamonds," replied the farmer-looking individual, recoiling a step or two to prevent their coming too near. As he did so, he reached down his hand and rested it on his revolver.

"Tut, tut, my little man! Didn't your mother teach you that it's wrong to tell fibs? I seen you draw out the diamonds from under the rock only a few minutes ago."

"There's where you're mistaken," replied Ely, with the manner of one who was sure that the error would relieve him of any further annoyance from the tramps.

"How is that, pard?"

"It wasn't diamonds at all. I took a peep into the package and saw it was *money*—all new bills and every one of 'em worth a thousand dollars. Why, I've got enough here to make me and all my friends rich for the rest of my life."

"Well, pard, I was joking about the diamonds; I knowed it was money. That's where Bill and me keep our bank account, but we won't arrest and put you in jail for burglarizing our bank. We'll be kinder to you than that, and let you go if you'll hand over that boodle right off!"

"I shan't do it."

"Then we'll hev to make you, that's all, and you'll be sorry that you ever refused."

The couple were edging toward Ely with a purpose too manifest to be mistaken, and he saw it would not do to trifle longer. With a lightninglike sweep of his arm he leveled his weapon in the faces of the couple, with the words: "One step nearer, and I'll shoot!"

The moon had risen while this little affair was going on in the forest opening. The foremost tramp had gathered his muscles for a leap upon the supposed farmer, when he recoiled at sight of the gleaming pistol, whose muzzle almost touched his nose.

More than that, one of the chambers was discharged, the bullet nipping his ear, while a second whizzed behind the crimson countenance of his companion, just behind him.

"That's to let you know I'm ready for you," remarked Ely; "the next time I'll shoot to kill."

The terrified miscreants stumbled on their hands and knees in their desperate efforts to get out of range.

"Don't shoot! don't shoot!" called out the leader; "we won't hurt you; we was only in fun!"

Ely did not stir, but stood with foot slightly advanced and his weapon at a dead level. The tramps scrambled to their feet, ducked their heads, with their hands held about their ears, as if to ward off the expected shots, and dashed beyond reach with such ludicrous haste that their conqueror shook with laughter.

"I think I've seen men surprised, but never a couple more stirred than they."

When they were out of sight Ely turned about, still holding his pistol ready for instant use, and started from the spot.

His intention at first was to follow the trail over a portion of which he had made his way thither; but he decided that it was more prudent to move among the trees. True, he had given the tramps the biggest scare of their lives, but they would soon recover, and were not likely to yield the chance of securing such an immense sum of money as they knew he had with him. They would steal through the woods, on the watch to leap upon and throttle him. Besides, their panic and flight were no proof that they had no weapons themselves.

That this precaution was wise on his part was proven within the succeeding few minutes.

The gloom beneath the trees made the work of picking his way difficult and tedious. Occasionally, despite his

care, he bumped against the trunk of a tree, and once an obtruding limb passed beneath his chin and almost lifted him off his feet. He stopped, and then heard faintly but distinctly the sound of stealthy footsteps behind him.

"I won't miss them next time if they dare attack me," he muttered, stationing himself close to the nearest tree which he could find in the darkness. His weapon was still in his hand, and he was never more in earnest with any resolve.

But the tramps were cunning. They had guided their own movements by the faint footfalls on the leaves in front, and their cessation warned them of their danger. They stopped, too, and waited for him to resume his walk.

Brave as was Kneeland Ely, he had enough wisdom to appreciate his own peril. These men might shoot him down without giving him a chance of defending himself. It would be reckless to incur such a risk. He resorted to stratagem to defeat it.

With the utmost care he began a withdrawal from the spot, changing his course so that his enemies could not keep track of him, provided they did not hear the rustling leaves.

It was not necessary for him to go far before resuming the direct course to the highway. The straining ear detected no sound like that which had warned him of his peril, and he became confident that he had thrown the vagrants off his trail.

This was unquestionably a great point accomplished, for when he repeatedly stopped and listened, he failed to hear anything alarming. Finally, he dismissed all apprehension and advanced with less care than before.

This, we repeat, was a great point secured, but, with all of Kneeland Ely's sagacity, he fell into an unsuspected dilemma. The several changes of direction, with no beaten path or landmark to guide him, resulted in a confusion of the points of the compass, as is inevitably the case with the most experienced ranger of the woods.

When certain that he had traveled far enough to reach the highway where he had left his horse and wagon, he

was still among the trees, enveloped in gloom and with no idea of where he stood.

"I believe I am lost!" he said, with a shiver of dread, "and, if that is so, there's no chance of finding my way out before morning."

While the prospect was anything but pleasant, there was nothing in it, after all, to cause misgiving. The night was crisp and cool, but he was well clothed, and he grimly thought that any one with a hundred thousand dollars in bank bills reposing against his chest could not long feel uncomfortable.

He tramped three times as far as the distance from the forest opening, and found himself still in the woods. He halted once more and listened.

"Those fellows are gone, that's one comfort. I wonder whether they also went astray? That charger of mine is securing a good rest, but he must begin to feel hungry by this time and puzzled to keep the run of matters."

He took some consolation in smoking a cigar. By keeping the glowing tip free of ashes he was able to use it as a tiny lamp, now and then, and thus saved himself some unwelcome experiences. But the weed smoked at such a vigorous pace was soon exhausted, and growing tired of the enjoyment, he flung away the stump.

"I will give up after trying it a little longer— Helloa!"

It was the neigh of a horse that caused this exclamation. It sounded to his left, not in the direction, as it seemed, of the highway; but, remembering his mistake, he turned toward the point, and had not gone far when, to his delight, he debouched into the road which he had sought so long in vain.

He could hardly believe his good fortune, but when the neigh was repeated, and, a few rods away, he identified the horse and wagon with which he had come from Berwyck hours before, all doubt vanished.

"That's my own blooded steed!" he called, feeling, in his gratitude, like flinging his arms about the animal's neck. "I am more pleased to meet you, Longfellow, than if you were my long-lost brother."

So far as could be perceived in the darkness, the beast

had not attempted to stir from his position since being tied hours before. But, as Ely remembered, the interval had been long enough for him to become hungry, and he was eager to get back to his stable.

He was quickly unfastened, turned about, and the man climbed into the wagon and took the reins and whip in hand. There was no need, however, of the latter, for, to the amazement of the driver, the animal instantly broke into a loping trot without urging, and seemed disposed to keep it up the entire distance, especially where the road was downhill.

Shortly after turning into the main highway Ely discerned a man ahead of him, walking quite rapidly. By this time the moon was well up in the sky, and he could see so distinctly that he recognized him as the one that had stood in the clearing and was about to take the package of money from under the rock when he desisted because of the presence of Bookkeeper Dixon.

This individual, having partly rallied from his shock, was hurrying toward town. He was in the middle of the road, but, on hearing the rattle of the wagon behind him, stepped aside to allow it to pass.

As he came opposite, Ely checked his horse.

"Won't you ride?" he asked, looking down on the man.

"No; I thank you. I prefer to walk."

"I am going straight to Berwyck, and it will save you some time, for this animal, as you can see, is a trotter."

Thus urged, the footman accepted the invitation, climbing nimbly over the wheel and taking a seat alongside of Ely, who once more started his horse on a trot.

It seemed like running a great risk, for how could Ely know his passenger would not recognize him? Brief as had been his stay in Berwyck, he had been around the place long enough for many persons to see and learn who he was.

It need hardly be said, however, that when he assumed the guise of a farmer, on applying at the livery stable for this wretched turnout, he donned something in the nature of a disguise besides his shabby garments. The dilapidated hat which covered the head had a quantity of

frowsy, sandy hair sewed within, which hung about his shoulders; and, after reaching the country, he slipped a tuft of whiskers over his chin so deftly adjusted that the trick would not be noticed, except under close inspection by daylight.

In consonance with his assumed character, the watchman imparted a twang and peculiar accent to his voice while speaking to his passenger. He indulged in some enlightening remarks about the weather and crop prospects, and exerted himself the best he knew how to draw the man into conversation. But the latter was in no mood for anything of the kind. It would have been strange, after his soul-stirring experience, had he responded to the remarks of his companion. His responses, when there were any, were so curt that the pretended farmer soon gave up the attempt.

"He has been back to the rock under which he hid the hundred thousand dollars, and knows that it is lost," was the thought of the driver; "but how would he feel if he knew the whole sum was within a few inches of him this very minute?"

It was a strange situation indeed!

Arrived at the outskirts of the town, the passenger requested Ely to allow him to get out. He courteously thanked the supposed farmer for his kindness and disappeared along the main street, while the driver turned in the direction of the livery stable, where, after considerable difficulty, he had managed to hire the team.

"You were gone so long," remarked the owner, "that I was about to send out a search party."

"I know why you did not."

"What was the reason?"

"This outfit isn't worth the five dollars' deposit you required before you hired it to me. You knew I would be back after the balance."

Ely affected indignation at the trick that had been played on him, and did not tarry long at the place. It was not very late in the evening, and he managed to restore himself to something like his original appearance without attracting attention to the process. His old hat,

with his extra head of hair and the chin-whiskers, were slipped into his valise; he smoothed down his trousers over his boot-legs, and folded the shabby coat and carried it over his arm.

This was so effective that when he presented himself at his boarding-place he was admitted without question.

It will not be denied that Kneeland Ely had been through a unique experience; enough to keep almost any person's brain in a whirl. We have shown that once that night he lost his self-command, though he quickly regained it. But the long tramp through the woods, when, but for a happy chance he would not have found his way out until morning, and the ride back to Berwyck had given him opportunity to recover his poise, so that, when he climbed to his room and locked his door behind him, he was as cool as when sitting in the apartment of Pixley Fagan at the hotel and discussing this business.

He turned up the gas to a full head, and set a chair against the door, so that no one could see the interior through the keyhole. When certain he was entirely alone, he unbuttoned his coat, drew out the package of brown paper bound around with so many rubber bands and opened and counted the contents.

There was exactly one hundred thousand dollars. This was the large amount stolen from the Berwyck Bank, and here it was in his hands, ready to be restored to the rightful owners. The case had been pushed through to a speedy conclusion indeed.

He recalled the peculiar circumstances under which he had recovered it. If he chose, he might retain every dollar and no suspicion could ever attach to him. Not a living soul beside himself knew that he had visited the lonely section and taken it from under the rock where it was hidden. Even if the tramps chose to tell their story, it could not turn the eye of the law to him.

The farmer, who was the chief actor in that little drama, had gone out of existence.

CHAPTER XXII.

"I COME TO PLEAD FOR MERCY."

BUT, if Kneeland Ely sat for a long time, his head bowed in distracting thought, it was not because anything in the nature of temptation disturbed him.

He was an honest man. He may have reflected how easily he could appropriate the large sum of money to his own use, but it was not the first time he had done so, in his long and eventful experience, and never had it been with even a momentary inclination to do a dishonorable act. Nevertheless, his meditation was of a most painful nature.

"The last thread of doubt is removed. In the face of the overwhelming evidence I cherished a weak hope that the end might be different. If the trusted family physician hears many secrets that lower his estimate of human nature, the detective is forced to go through the same melancholy experience. I am and always will be a poor man, but I would give all I have in the world were this only a dream; but, alas! it cannot be."

He rose from his chair, carefully replaced the large bills in the package, wrapped them about with the same coarse paper, strung the rubber bands as they were before, and then placed the bundle under his pillow, beside his revolver, the empty chambers of which had been recharged. Then he retired and slept soundly until morning.

Having made his breakfast, he went round to the hotel, where he knew Detective Fagan was anxiously awaiting him. When the door was locked and they were alone Ely asked:

"Have you any news to communicate?"

"Nothing; I spent the evening, or rather a part of it, in completing my preparations for leaving Berwyck."

"We shall both go away to-day, having finished the saddest task either of us ever performed."

"I strolled by the houses of Dixon and President Dillingham last night, but think neither of them was at home."

"No; they were both absent."

"I am waiting, Len, for the particulars."

Thereupon Kneeland Ely, beginning at the point when he assumed the character of an innocent, unsuspecting farmer, driving homeward with a miserable animal, related everything that had taken place while he was playing that part, and with which the reader is already familiar.

"There is the whole story, and the question is, what shall be the next step?" he added.

"We set out to recover the one hundred thousand dollars, and it has been done. The parenthetical episode, as you call it, of the four burglars has resulted badly—that is, for *them*. Since they are disposed of, they disappear from the question."

"Yes; no further thought need be given to them."

"The money having been recovered, all that remains is to restore it to the bank."

"*There* lies the difficulty; how shall it be done?"

"Is not the matter a simple one?"

"Suppose you or I go down there and hand the package to President Dillingham and whoever of the directors may be there, what sort of story shall go with the act in the way of explanation?"

"Simply say that we have succeeded in recovering the funds, but we cannot give particulars."

"That course was so direct that it was the one that instantly occurred to me, but fatal objections are in the way."

"Why not tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?"

"In most of the affairs of life that is the safest rule, but it has its exceptions, and this is one of them. Reflect, and you will see the consequences are likely to be of the gravest character."

Detective Fagan did reflect, with the result of saying:

"You are so much clearer-headed than I that I prefer the directions shall come from you."

Ely arose and thoughtfully walked across the floor.

"One of us must go to the house of President Dillingham and see him alone; that is to be the first step."

"You are the man to do that."

"I think not; you came here in response to his request for a detective. He has known you as such all the way through. I played the part of watchman for the bank."

"And did it to perfection."

"That is neither here nor there; he still looks upon me as nothing more than a watchman. That fact will serve as a barrier between us."

"Which, however, can be readily removed."

"None the less it will preclude or render more difficult the feeling of absolute confidence that must exist between Dillingham and the one who takes the money to him."

"I am ready to do as you wish."

"The sooner begun the sooner finished— Helloa!"

A knock sounded on the door. Detective Fagan unlocked and opened it, as Ely shrank back out of sight.

A colored boy stood outside with a card, which he handed to the officer. The latter glanced at it, and telling the lad to wait outside, closed the door again.

"What do you think of *that?*" asked Fagan, passing the card to his friend, who read:

"Miss Mina Crosslands."

Underneath her name the young lady had written in pencil:

"*Must see you at once on a matter of the utmost importance. With your permission, I will call on you in your room.*"

"This is a strange request," remarked Fagan, looking at the other for his explanation.

"I see nothing strange in it. I am not surprised; I would be more surprised if some such request was not made by her."

"But she asks to come to my room, here, instead of sending for me to go to her house, as I would have been glad to do."

"You can readily understand why she doesn't wish you to call there—*as yet.*"

"Shall I send for her?"

"By all means, and do not keep her waiting."

"And what shall you do in the meantime?"

"Withdraw to my room. She hasn't asked to see *me*, and would resent my presence."

"Don't you wish to hear what passes between us?"

"It would be interesting, but there is no necessity; you can tell me all that it is worth while to know."

Fagan stepped to the door and directed the waiting boy to show up the lady. Ely slipped out to his own room.

The detective used the minute or two at his disposal in putting his apartment in the best shape he could to receive a lady. He had barely time to complete the work when a timid knock sounded on the door.

He drew it back and bowed low to her who stood before him. They had met often enough to feel acquainted.

One glance at that countenance told the anguish that had impelled the visitor to this step. She was pale, and her lip quivered despite the brave effort she made to repress her agitation.

"Will you be kind enough to step inside?" asked Fagan, a little embarrassed at making the request.

"Thank you," she replied, in a voice hardly above a whisper, acting on the invitation.

"Shall I close the door?" he asked, hesitating with his hand on the knob.

"Do so, please, and lock it."

Nothing less than desperate urgency could impel a lady of her refinement to make this request, aware as she was that it was liable to cruel criticism.

But when hope, despair, disgrace, ruin, death, life are all tugging at one's heartstrings there can be no hesitation.

Like a true gentleman, Detective Fagan promptly obeyed, for to have withstood her, even for a moment, would have implied a distrust of her motives. Then he placed a chair near the middle of the room and bowed her to it. He seated himself opposite. Both could look straight into each other's faces during the interview.

"Are we alone?" was her first question, accompanied by an apprehensive glance about the room.

"Entirely so," was his reassuring reply.

"And no one can overhear what is said?"

"Not unless we shout our words, which I hardly think either of us proposes to do."

It was the manner more than the sentences of Fagan which reassured the young lady. She had come with the intention of trusting him fully, as indeed it was indispensable she should do, and her confidence in the man increased after she had "crossed the Rubicon" and seated herself in his room.

"Mr. Fagan, you were surprised to receive my card?"

"Yes; I will not deny that it startled me at first, but I may add that when I came to reflect my surprise passed away. I expected to receive some word from you to-day."

"But not in the shape of a request to be admitted to your room?"

"Hardly that, but reflection again showed me the best of reason for that request. I would have felt honored in calling at your home, but you could not have guaranteed that we would be wholly alone there. There is no certainty of privacy in the parlor of the hotel, and it was imperative that you should see me here; this is the only place. That, surely, is sufficient explanation."

"May I ask," he added, "before you make known your errand, whether you are prepared to trust me fully?"

"I am resolved to do so."

"Thank you. Be assured that I will respect your confidence to the last degree."

"Do you know my errand?"

"Yes, and if it is any encouragement, let me assure you further *I know all.*"

She looked him in the face, and in a low, tremulous voice, hardly above a whisper, said:

"Then I come to plead for mercy."

CHAPTER XXIII.

"AND SO HE LEFT THEM."

NOTHING could have exceeded the gentle courtesy and delicate consideration which Detective Fagan showed toward Miss Crosslands during this most painful inter-

view of her life. To convince her that he was truthful in declaring that he *knew all*, as he had asserted, he told everything he had learned concerning the robbery of the Berwyck Bank.

Then when she started to make the plea for mercy, as she said was her errand, he raised his hand in protest.

"Say no more, Miss Crosslands; it shall be as you wish."

"Oh, how shall I ever thank you?" she exclaimed, her face aglow with happiness. "I shall bless you as long as I live! Can it be true? Can it be? can it be?"

He repeated his assurances, and a few minutes later escorted her downstairs, saying, as he bade her good-by, that her uncle would receive an important call that afternoon.

"And now," he asked, as he rejoined Kneeland Ely and related what had passed, "shall it be you or I that is to visit President Dillingham?"

"You are the man."

"As you think best. You will stay in Berwyck until the thing is through?"

"Yes; I may be needed, though I doubt whether Dillingham will care to meet me when he comes to know all."

It was not until afternoon that Detective Fagan presented himself at the handsome residence of President Dillingham, he having taken the precaution first to send a messenger with the request for a private and important interview, and asking the banker to name the hour for the meeting.

The gentleman received him himself, in the hall, and led the way to the library, whose door was closed, he having instructed his niece and servants to permit no one under any pretext to disturb them.

The officer's experienced eye was quick to note the pale face and nervous manner of the host.

He could not but know the subject which was to form the theme of the interview, but it was impossible to conjecture all that was coming.

Nothing was to be gained by circumlocution, and, after the few briefest preliminaries, Detective Fagan came to the point.

"Mr. Dillingham, as you are aware, less than a week has passed since the robbery of the Berwyck Bank. One hundred thousand dollars was taken from its big safe and carried away by some one who, it was evident, knew the combination by which the lock was opened. That much being stated, let me relate a little fable.

"There was once a man in middle life, comparatively wealthy, respected, and with the fullest confidence of the community in which he lived. Not a whisper of scandal had ever tarnished his name, and to all who knew him he was the synonym of honesty and absolute integrity.

"There are many who claim that no human being is proof against temptation. It is simply a question of the degree necessary to conquer them. That so many of us commit no dishonest act is because we have not been tempted to the point that would insure our downfall.

"It is a generally accepted creed, also, that no person becomes bad all at once. The act which causes him to cross the line may be a sudden one, but the changes in his own nature which bring it about have been going on for years; in other words, it is simply the fruit of the planting made long before.

"Be that as it may, it will not be denied that there are many instances in which a man yields without being conscious of this preliminary struggle or change. Like the reformed drunkard, moments of mortal weakness come, and he is attacked at the most unexpected times, and before he has a chance to gird himself for the conflict. He does that which he would not have done an hour before nor an hour after; the temptation came unannounced, and he fell.

"Without attempting to spin any fine theory, I am sure you will catch my meaning and understand the case I have in mind—"

"Have done with this nonsense! Stop seeking for some excuse for me; there is none. Call things by their right names and drop that silly fable, as you call it; use plain English."

"Very well," calmly remarked the officer; "I will not

mince words nor spare your feelings. My language, therefore, will be pointed, and you must not complain if I hit hard."

"You cannot hit half as hard as I deserve," grimly responded the banker, who kept his eyes fixed on the countenance of the other.

"I have not attempted, in putting forward my theory, to shield you against your own judgment, which is a harsh one. While I can find a palliation for your stealing, I can find none for that which preceded and accompanied it. I never knew anything baser nor more treacherous."

"There was never anything *as* base and treacherous," interjected the banker, more merciless to himself than was his visitor.

"Very few, that is true: but let that pass for the present and keep to the hard facts. When you saw the one hundred thousand dollars placed in the vault of the bank (I believe you put it there yourself in the presence of the cashier), your temptation came. You, who had scarcely ever entertained a thought of dishonesty, now decided to steal that money. It was the supreme crisis of your moral life, and you fell.

"But, with all the facilities at your command for doing this great wrong, you saw the necessity of 'covering your tracks,' as the expression goes. You displayed the cunning of the most accomplished scoundrel that is now serving time in the penitentiary."

There was no mistaking this language, but the man at whom it was aimed compressed his lips and nodded his head, saying:

"*Now* you are uttering truth."

"You had every facility, I say, but even then it would not do for you to make a blunder at any point. The watchman, Walker Otter, was incorruptibly honest. Even if he were not you wanted no partner in your shameful crime, for a partner would compel a division of the plunder, and that touched your mean nature. Furthermore, you would be at the mercy of a second party, which is always dangerous.

"Otter has been troubled with rheumatism for years, and, as he admitted, has been accustomed to spend part of his nights at the bank in slumber. But he was liable to awake, and it would not do for you to be seen, even though he had no right to question your actions. So you gave him a bottle of medicine for his rheumatism, with instructions to take it early in the evening. He did so; it contained a drug which forced him to sleep like a log for ten hours—"

"How do you know *that?*" interrupted President Dillingham, starting with alarm. "It is true, but how came *you* to know it?"

"Easily enough; the fact that the man slept so soundly was suspicious, and he was questioned. He still had the bottle of medicine which you procured for him. Its odor betrayed the laudanum; but he had no suspicion, nor will he ever have any of the trick played on him."

"Where is the bottle now?"

"Smashed to fragments, and the contents gone."

"Thanks—thanks for doing that."

"It was not I who did it, but another; one of the truest friends you ever had. He managed it so well that that thick skull of Walker Otter will never have room for an inkling of the truth."

"But who is this man—this friend, as you call him?"

"One moment. Having fixed matters with Otter, you went to the bank at midnight, opened the outer door with your own key, did the same to the big safe or vault, took out the one hundred thousand dollars and went home.

"In order to hide your tracks the more effectually you applied to Mr. Leonidas Wyxtree, chief of the National Detective Agency, for help in tracing the burglars and recovering the funds. You supposed he sent but one detective here—myself—when, in fact, he sent a couple."

"Who was the second?" asked the astonished bank president.

"He came to you as Kneeland Ely, highly recommended by a banker friend of yours—so highly recommended, indeed, that you engaged him off-hand as watchman.'

"And *he* is a detective?" repeated the amazed host.

"Rather," replied Fagan, with a smile, "and a pretty good one, too, for he is Chief Leonidas Wyxtree himself."

President Dillingham started, as well he might, at this announcement, for no suspicion of Kneeland Ely had ever entered his thoughts.

Detective Fagan paused a moment that the full effect might not be lost, and then proceeded:

"Chief Wyxtree is my superior in every respect, and he had been on the ground but a short time when he suspected the truth; that is, that only one person was concerned in the robbery of the Berwyck Bank, and that person was its trusted president.

"It was one thing, however, to hold the suspicion and quite another to prove it. To establish that proof became his special work and province."

"What first directed suspicion to *me?*" asked the host, growing more interested in the narrative itself, even though it scarified him so fiercely.

"Several things. The first, perhaps, resulted from that fact that you were one of the two that were known to have the power to do what was done, though it was possible, and indeed quite probable, that the bookkeeper, Frank Dixon, had managed to secure the secret of the safe combination. If so, one of three persons must be the criminal.

"A study of those three individuals led us, at first, to suspect Dixon, but the chief was not fully satisfied. I may say that when you first called on the new watchman I was with him, and hid in the closet of the directors' room. We were in the front of the building when we saw the white gleam of the letter as it was pushed into view. Wyxtree hurriedly opened the door and told me to follow the person whose stealthy footsteps were plainly heard. I tried to do so, but was a minute too late."

"Do you know who that man was?" asked the banker, with a grim smile.

"Yes; I am now talking to him. Neither of us saw you, but though you ran very fast for a man of your years, the chief afterward learned your identity.

"Once we suspected that Dixon was associated with you in the crime, but that letter placed us right on that point."

"How?"

"In the first place, you began to grow uneasy over the fact that I was on the ground and at work. You proposed the compromise, hoping you could bring it about and secure the majority of the plunder without further danger to yourself. But it is fortunate for you, Mr. Dillingham, that your proposition was not acted upon. Your discovery would have followed beyond all doubt and become known to the whole community. It was for that reason that Chief Wyxtree suppressed it. He thought you were too good a man to be sacrificed."

"Great heavens! why should he think *that?*"

"He has more heart than most people suppose. You will recall that I came here some days ago with the request for a specimen of Dixon's handwriting. You gave it to me, but with it was a sample of *your* penmanship which the chief instructed me to be sure to get."

"I never dreamed that you had any purpose in asking for that draft of my letter."

"That obtained, the chief and myself sat down and made a careful study and comparison of the two, and the disguised hand in the misspelled missive that was shoved by you under the door of the bank. The conclusion that I reached was that Bookkeeper Dixon wrote the proposition, ostensibly coming from the burglars. I observed many similarities between the two.

"Chief Wyxtree, however, came to form another opinion, from which he could not be moved. He admitted the resemblances I pointed out, but proved that you laboriously made them for the very purpose of misleading the experts into the belief that it was written by your bookkeeper, anticipating as you did the test to which it was subjected. *That*, Mr. Dillingham, is the one act connected with this affair for which I can find no palliation nor excuse, for it has none."

The bank president leaned his head on his hands and groaned.

"There never *can be* any justification; no, not the slightest palliation. It was infamous, shameful, fiendish, horrible, for Frank Dixon is one of the best of men. He expects to marry my niece, the most amiable and lovely of her sex. He is the only support of his widowed mother, a gentleman as much my superior, morally, as an angel is to Satan."

"And they have proved all you say by their conduct, for the two love you, and charitably believed you had been led to do this unspeakably wicked thing through a temporary aberration of mind. Your niece was more observant than you suspected. She attributed your strange conduct after the robbery to something more than worriment over the loss of the funds to the bank. She must have discovered something which led her to suspect the fearful truth, for in no other way can her extraordinary and sensible course be explained."

Detective Fagan did not deem it best to impart more on this point. Had he chosen, he might have said that that very morning she had told of her uncle's broken utterances in sleep, which she overheard from the adjoining room, and which changed faint suspicion to conviction. She had seen him place a bundle under his coat and start out of the house. She watched him from the window and observed that he took the direction of the open country. She knew he was going somewhere to hide the money until the hue and cry was over.

Independent of her, Dixon had formed the same suspicion. More hopeful than she, he thought, with a charity which did more credit to his heart than to his head, that Mr. Dillingham would realize the enormity of his sin and soon restore the funds. She had made him her confidant, and he watched the bank to learn whether he did so. He was too late to see him thrust the letter under the door, and, returning home, he passed by her house and signaled that nothing had taken place.

"Dixon was convinced," continued the detective, "that you would visit the hiding-place of the money, whether you intended to return it or not. He followed and saw you when you halted by the rock, with the intention of

satisfying yourself that the package was where you had placed it. Unfortunately, however, his interest became so absorbing that he betrayed himself. You discovered him at the critical moment, and started toward him in a towering rage. He met you calmly and began an earnest expostulation and plea. You were humiliated and exasperated at the discovery of your perfidy, and, for a time, would not listen; but he persevered. Finally, the good angel that is at every man's elbow won, and you consented to return the funds, but demanded that he should leave you alone. He exacted your solemn pledge and went home in the early dusk of last night."

"But—but," faltered President Dillingham, "when did he tell you all this?"

"Neither I nor Chief Wyxtree has exchanged a word with him."

"How, then, did you come to know it?"

"Have I stated the truth?"

"Every syllable is as accurate as Holy Writ."

"There was a third party who witnessed your interview. He dared not draw near enough to overhear what was said, but it was easy for him to judge from the actions of you two what passed between you."

"Where were you concealed?"

"It was not I, but Chief Wyxtree. When you were left alone in the gloom and shadows of the wood the moral battle of your life was renewed. There were moments when you were on the point of breaking away from the pledge you had given the young man. I presume (for of this I cannot be certain) you were tempted to take the money and flee to some foreign country, there to enjoy your ill-gotten gains."

"You are not precisely right," said the banker, with a deep sigh. "It is true I *thought* of that, but there never was a moment when I faltered in my resolution to restore the money to the bank. The question which I debated was how to do it and still keep the truth hidden from others. I finally decided to say that it had been left at my house by some stranger in disguise without any explanation."

"I am glad to hear that. You made your decision and hurried along the path in the woods to where you had hidden the money. Fired with your new resolution, you stooped down, thrust your hand under the big rock and—"

"*It was gone!*" broke in President Dillingham, leaping from his chair and pacing up and down the library, overcome with excitement. "Yes, it had been taken by some one else! The opportunity to make restitution is denied me. I had offended Heaven too grievously to be pardoned. I have suffered, and am suffering, the torments of the lost. But I deserve it. I ought to rot in prison, and I WILL!"

He spoke so hurriedly that his visitor could not check him. With the utterance of the last agonized expression he dropped back limp and helpless in his chair, and would have swooned dead away had not the detective sprang to him and said:

"Stop! stop! it is not so bad as that."

"What do you say? Ah! why do you mock me? There is no hope for me. I beg you, leave me alone; I deserve no pity!"

"But I insist there *is* hope; things are not as bad as you think. Calm yourself and listen to me."

"Am I dreaming?" he muttered. "What you say cannot be true."

"This is too grave a matter for trifling. Hear me through, I beg of you. After you left the opening in the woods with Dixon, Chief Wyxtree, who was hiding among the trees, and who read aright the meaning of your actions, went to the rock, stooped down and drew out the package of money, intact—"

"WHAT!"

"Remain calm," interposed the visitor, motioning him back in his chair. "It is as I tell you. Had he been a little later the money would have been taken by a couple of tramps prowling in the vicinity, and waiting for you to return. They did not think it worth while to make search, and so the chief was ahead of them. They tried to take it from him, but he was able to stand them off with his revolver."

"Strange that I did not see Wyxtree," remarked Mr. Dillingham, trembling from head to foot.

"You did see and speak to him."

"You are mistaken there."

"While walking homeward, dejected and heartbroken, did not a farmer take you in his wagon and bring you to town?"

"Yes; such is the fact."

"That supposed farmer was Chief Wyxtree, and when you two sat beside each other in the little old wagon the package of one hundred thousand dollars was under his coat."

"Why—why didn't he tell me?"

"Isn't it better that it should be as it is? There was no wish to trifle with your feelings or prolong your suffering, though you deserved no consideration."

"I admit it. But the money, can you tell where it is?"

Detective Fagan had held his right hand under the front of his coat for the last few minutes. At this question he drew it out and tossed the package into the lap of the banker.

"There it is! Not one dollar is missing. Mercy!"

This time President Dillingham fainted in reality. His emotion was too intense longer to be borne.

The visitor sprang to his help, but no water was at hand. He hurried to the door leading to the hall. Before he could turn the knob Miss Crosslands appeared, pale and agitated.

"I heard a cry; what does it mean?" she asked, glancing about the room.

"Some water, quick! Your uncle has swooned."

She darted away, and was back again instantly with a pitcher. Fagan took it from her hand, sprinkled some of the fluid in the white face and then held the pitcher to the pallid lips.

Mr. Dillingham speedily revived and looked around with a faint wildness in his eyes.

"Mina! Mina!" he moaned, looking sorrowfully up in her pitying countenance, "can you—can you and Frank ever forgive me?"

"Yes, we forgive you with our whole hearts. All shall be well, and Heaven will pardon you, as we all need pardon."

"How can you and he do it?" moaned the old man, looking up in the face of his niece with a faint, wondering wildness. "I do not deserve such kindness, and yet —yet—"

"You were not yourself. Frank thinks so, and I know it; we have believed it all along. Now, be content with that."

Thinking the detective might wish to say something more to her uncle, and seeing there was no longer need of her presence, Miss Crosslands withdrew.

"I will call you if you should be needed," said Fagan, as she cast a grateful look at him, "but I do not think you will be."

"I may as well bid you good-by," said Fagan. "In our talk over the earlier events we have forgotten those of a later date."

"To what do you refer?" asked President Dillingham, who had regained, to a degree, his self-control.

"The visit of the burglars."

"What about them? They got nothing."

"No, but are as guilty as if they did. They are securely locked up, and will remain until their trial. Wyxtree and I will be on hand as witnesses when needed, and they will all receive long terms."

"But—Mr. Fagan—how—shall I explain the return of this money?"

"Tell the directors that the detective secured the funds, but he will give no further information, nor can the thieves be punished. I presume they are like the average bank director, and will be so pleased to get back the funds that they will care little about bringing the criminals to book, especially as they will save a pile of money by not making the attempt.

"Our office will send you an account of the services of Chief Wyxtree and myself; so, good-by."

He took the hot hand of President Dillingham, who looked up gratefully and murmured:

"Heaven will reward you. I do not know how to thank you and your employer."

"We are more than repaid by the results."

Miss Crosslands met him at the door and restrained him for a moment. Her eyes were filled with tears and her voice was tremulous as she, in turn, took his hand.

"Mr. Fagan, you have brought sunlight and happiness to more than one heart. You have been the instrument of saving a human soul, and God never fails to bless the man or woman who does that. I thank you beyond the power of words to express."

Pixley Fagan attempted to reply, but somehow the words remained in his throat. He turned silently away, and so he left them.

THE END.



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